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# Implementing the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project in a Junior High School

by

Andrea P. Spevak

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

International and Global Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2003

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Sept. 30, 2003
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**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Implementing the Safe and Caring Schools Project in a Junior High School* submitted by *Andrea Paula Spevak* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Master of Education* in *International and Global Education*.

Dr. André P. Grace, Supervisor

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Date: 17 Sept. 2003

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the process of implementing the Alberta Teachers' Association's Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) Project in one small, urban junior high school in Edmonton. The SACS Project aims to encourage teachers and parents to model respect, responsibility, and non-violent conflict resolution skills. This study documents the strategies teachers used to integrate the SACS Project within the school curriculum, and examines the changes that ensued.

To ensure teacher involvement and control, action research was used as the overlying methodology. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and staff meetings. Both teacher and student perspectives were examined.

The study found that teachers became more aware of how their teaching practice influenced student behaviour. In turn, students became more aware of how their actions affected others. Some noted an increased willingness to report bullying to teachers. Generally, teachers felt that more time was needed to make an observable change in school climate.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Andre Grace, for his wisdom, guidance, patience, and reassurance throughout the entire thesis process. As well, I would like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Frank Peters and Dr. Maryanne Doherty. Their insights and suggestions were very much appreciated.

Without the time and effort of the students, teachers, and administrators who participated in my research, this study would not have been possible. I am extremely grateful for their thoughtfulness and honesty throughout the data collection process. Their dedication to the SACS Project made the research a rewarding experience.

I am truly indebted to Barb Maheu for her wisdom and advice, and for her faith in me throughout this exciting journey. Working with her has made my research experience an invaluable learning opportunity.

Finally, I would like to thank my two families, the Spevaks and the Paynes, and my friend, Carrie Malloy, for all their support. Particularly, I owe a big thank you to Jeremy for his patience and confidence in me, and to the baby in my belly, whose constant kicking kept me aware of why I had to finish.

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# Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Fuelled by erratic instances of school shootings and fatal youth beatings across North America, school violence has gained increasing media attention over the past decade (Cole, 2003; Onstad, 1997; Trueman, 2002). Bullying, in particular, has captured the interest of concerned educators, researchers, parents, and governments, resulting in a number of recent studies on the prevalence of bullying in Canadian schools (Beran & Tutty, 2002; Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995; Craig & Pepler, 1997; MacDonald, 1995; O'Dea & Loewen, 1999; Pal & Day, 1991). For the majority of children, violent encounters are short-lived and relatively inconsequential (Pepler & Craig, 2000). However, the same studies draw attention to a smaller group of students, approximately 10-20% in Canada, for whom bullying is an enduring concern (Charach, et al., 1995; Pepler, Craig, & Roberts, 1998). For these children, experiencing physical and verbal abuse can become a part of daily school routine. For example, one Toronto study investigating bullying in elementary school playgrounds recorded 314 bullying episodes during 48 hours, translating to approximately one incident every seven minutes (Craig & Pepler, 1997). While these incidents do not involve the same children every time, once their role as victim has been established, children are generally targeted repeatedly (Olweus, 1993).

Numerous violence prevention initiatives have been launched in schools and communities across the country in response to this heightened awareness (Alberta Education, 1994; British Columbia Ministry of Education [BCEd], 2002; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2002; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Safe Schools Manitoba, 2003; Thompson, 1994). Despite these hopeful responses to what has been termed by some organizations a national problem (Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa, 2002), another common reaction to the perceived increase in school violence has not been

so constructive. Zero tolerance behavioural policies, characterized by their immediate, punitive, "no exceptions" approach to discipline, were quickly adopted by many school boards (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995). Unfortunately, by responding to all perceived actions of violence with immediate suspensions, regardless of circumstance and without allowing for an explanation, schools are setting the ground for demeaning, oppressive approaches to discipline (Casella, 2001). Rather than teaching students alternative ways of behaving, these methods only serve to suppress violence from occurring in the school, or in front of a teacher. Moreover, schools are missing the opportunity to teach children a valuable lesson. Encouraging students to agree on a form of restitution to compensate for the misbehaviour can empower students to resolve their own conflicts and, eventually, to regulate their own behaviour (Kamps, 2002). Especially since it has been acknowledged that reinforcing positive behaviour is much more effective in eliciting appropriate social interactions amongst students (Casella & Burstyn, 2001; Kamps, 2002), schools intent on preventing violence should focus more on modeling and reinforcing mutual respect and less on chastising mistakes (Algozzine, 2002). Unfortunately, at a time when schools are being encouraged to adopt programs that offer alternatives to punitive measures, zero tolerance policies are nevertheless gaining popularity (Day et al., 1995).

***The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project***

An increased focus on school violence, however, cannot ensure improvement on its own. Several elements must be present in order to effectively influence a positive change in the culture of a school. Adults must work cooperatively with students, parents, and the community to foster an atmosphere of interest, care, support, and safety for all. The Alberta Teachers' Association's [ATA] Safe and Caring Schools Project [SACS] is attempting to establish these elements within hundreds of school communities across Alberta. Initiated by the Alberta Teachers' Association in the spring of 1996, the SACS Project aims to "to encourage school practices that model and reinforce socially responsibly and respectful behaviours, so that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment" (ATA, 1997) (see Appendix A for a list of the philosophy and objectives of the SACS Project as outlined by Alberta Education). As a

comprehensive violence prevention and character education program, SACS focuses on affecting a child's total environment. All adults are encouraged to model positive social behaviours, teach peaceful conflict resolution skills, reinforce empathy, and empower children to take responsibility for their own actions. Inappropriate behaviours are viewed as opportunities to teach social skills. To this end, SACS stresses the importance of prompt, fair, and respectful responses to misbehaviour, and recommends giving children the opportunity to resolve their own problems with their newly developing skills.

SACS has developed four programs that emphasize the responsibility of all adults to reinforce these crucial social values. Three of these programs--*Supporting a Safe and Caring School*, *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum*, and *Supporting a Safe and Caring Profession,* have been designed to provide training, support, and resources to schools to encourage practices that model and reinforce these socially responsible behaviours. The fourth program, *Toward a Safe and Caring Community,* consists of workshops, resources, and activities to teach parents and other adults in the community to increase their awareness of their own values and use this heightened understanding to address bullying and inappropriate behaviours in children.

In addition to emphasizing an adult's role in reinforcing prosocial values, SACS also stresses the importance of peer influence in preventing bullying and promoting respectful behaviour. By advocating each child's responsibility in creating a safe school environment and maintaining a civil society, the SACS Project highlights the crucial role individuals and group members play in influencing the actions of others.

## Purpose of the Study

As the most stable organized institutions within most communities, schools are the most obvious spaces in which to effectively facilitate change relating to children. As societal concerns such as school violence gain public attention, schools are typically delegated the duty of addressing public anxieties and fixing social problems. With each

new societal issue comes another responsibility placed on the shoulders of our education systems.

Recent sensationalized incidents have branded bullying as one social issue in need of attention. Studies initiated in response to the heightened concern have found that while our schools continue to be generally safe places (Shaw, 2001), bullying is indeed an issue for some students (BCEd, 2002; Macdonald, 1998; National Crime Prevention Strategy [NCPS], 2002). While schools, districts, and governments have intensified their commitment towards decreasing violence and creating safe and caring communities for all students and teachers, more insight into the effectiveness of these initiatives is necessary (Day et al., 1995; Donaldson, 1999).

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project is one such program that aims to foster non-violent values and reduce bullying. While it is believed that over 500 schools across Alberta currently utilize SACS resources, assessment of its effectiveness in improving school atmosphere and decreasing violent behaviours has been sparse. Thus, this study aims to provide an in-depth look into the implementation of the SACS Project, illustrating changes that occurred after one school year. By examining the methods teachers used to integrate safe and caring values into school practice, the following research demonstrates how the SACS Project was implemented in a junior high school to begin inspiring a positive improvement in school culture. Both student and teacher perspectives are presented to provide a comprehensive school perspective of the process and the resulting change.

## Research Question and Sub-questions

The research question for this study was: "What processes do the junior high teachers use to promote and integrate the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools principles across the curriculum?"

In addition, sub-questions were developed to gain a better understanding of how well these processes worked and what effects they had on the teachers, students, and general school atmosphere:

1. What were the achievements and challenges of these processes?
2. How did teaching practice change among junior high staff during SACS implementation?
3. How did students' attitudes and behaviours change as a result of the SACS Project?
4. How did the school's atmosphere change as a result of the SACS Project?

This report is divided into six chapters. The following chapter is a review of the literature, which provides an overview of the issue of bullying in Canada and describes important elements of violence prevention programs. Chapter three describes the methodology used for this study and gives a detailed description of the data collection process. Next, chapters four and five comprehensively examine the teacher and student data, respectively. The final chapter concludes the report with a discussion of the results and conclusions, offering implications for practice.

## Chapter 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature will provide an overview of bullying and then will describe elements of school initiatives intended to prevent bullying behaviours in children. The chapter is divided into the following seven sections: (1) Violence in Schools: A National Problem? (2) What is Bullying? (3) The Extent of Bullying in Canada, (4) Bullies and Victims, Bystanders and Peacemakers, (5) Root Causes of Violence, (6) Violence Prevention, and (7) Characteristics of Violence Prevention Programs.

### Violence in Schools: A National Problem?

An increased focus on school violence has become very apparent over the past decade. The media has played a definite role in escalating public concern. Prompted by the deaths in Littleton, Taber, Victoria, and others across North America, current media attention to violent incidents in schools has driven many people to believe that violence among children is a recent, and increasing, phenomenon. School violence is easy for media to sensationalize. Typically associated with goodness and innocence, childhood that is interrupted by aggression and carnage can capture the concern of even the most hardened citizen.

Indeed, research shows that the media has greatly influenced public sentiment. Many people believe the rates of serious crimes are rising, despite statistics refuting these claims. A Statistics Canada paper investigating how violent crime in Canada has changed over recent years concluded that while "violent crime is a serious social issue… it has not substantially increased in recent years" (Bonta & Hanson, 1994, p. 1). In fact, victimization rates have actually decreased over the past decade. This paper also suggests

that violent behaviour is not a new problem in Canadian society, contesting societal assertions that violence is a recent phenomenon (Bonta & Hanson, 1994).

Exploring this incongruency between public fear and statistical facts led Bonta and Hanson to blame the media's portrayal of violence for this discrepancy. They also revealed how statistical reporting methods could contribute to the perception of increasing violence. For example, recent changes to the official procedures used to measure crime have led to an increase in crime detection and victim reporting. However, while acknowledging the need for statistical crime reporting to more accurately reflect actual violent incidents, Bonta and Hanson concede that "providing good, objective data on violent crime will be insufficient for alleviating public fears surrounding violence" (1994, p. 1). Ultimately, they stress the importance of prevention in alleviating public fear. "Focusing on the known offender … is unlikely to have a significant impact on violent crime rates. Society needs to promote early interventions that prevent the development of violent behaviour" (Bonta & Hanson, 1994, p. 1). Further development and universal availability of conflict resolution and related social skills programs targeting young children and youth will more likely address the actual incidence of aggression and violence in our society.

More recent findings substantiate the Bonta and Hanson (1994) article. A paper written for the John Howard Society (1998) explored the misconceptions around youth crime. This study found that despite a decrease in the overall youth court caseload rate between 1992 and 1996, the public generally perceived youth crime to be increasing in number and seriousness. The paper provokes the reader to consider how these misconceptions affect youth and society in general. "Among the detrimental effects of false public perceptions of youth crime are public intolerance, unnecessary legislation changes and inappropriate programming choices for young offenders" (Executive summary, para. 5). The author recommends that "public knowledge of the criminal justice system be improved, … the media become better informed about youth justice issues and more accurately report youth crime and …. the fears which accompany public

misconceptions about youth crime be respected and addressed" (Executive summary, para. 6).

Unfortunately, public perception, while not always based on reality, is infectious. Indeed, the notion of escalating violence has spread and has been found to affect student comfort levels in school. This has meant that the *possibility* of violence in the minds of children may be as much of an issue as the *actual occurrence* of violence. A study conducted in an Alberta school regarding student perceptions around the meaning of school violence found that the *threat* of violence was more prevalent than *actual* physical violence (MacDonald, 1995).

One benefit of the media's recent focus on school violence has been that bullying has gained unprecedented attention. This heightened awareness has sparked international interest, stimulating numerous research projects to explore the nature of violent behaviour and its relationship to other societal problems. School administrators, educators, and parents have mobilized community concerns into functional energy, implementing school and community programs aimed at teaching conflict resolution skills and creating a more peaceful society. It has become an opportune time for violence prevention programs, prompting schools anxious to improve their environment to ride the wave of public concern that this flurry of media attention has created.

The view of school violence in Canada has expanded to include "a continuum of behaviours which result either in physical or psychological harm" (MacDonald, 1998, p. 4). Over the last three decades, the term violence has evolved to include non-criminal behaviours such as bullying and non-physical behaviours that cause others harm. In fact, bullying has become "the most frequently identified form of violence in schools" (RESOLVE, 2002). This changing perception has repositioned the issue of violence from a societal issue to an educational one.

***Terminology Used***

In discussing bullying, it is important to highlight the problem with the underlying meanings of the terminology. The terms *bully* and *victim* are generally used to represent the implicated students and their relationship to one another. Implicit in these terms are the behaviours that characterize each identity--*bully* as big, ruthless, and aggressive, and *victim* as vulnerable and helpless. Unfortunately, by eliciting these images, these terms function to brand each student, making the behaviours more permanent. Especially problematic for a student who engages in bullying behaviour, which is believed to be calculated and intentional, the label of bully will only strengthen their identity as such.

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project warns against labelling children as bullies, arguing that these descriptors are difficult to escape once they become connected to the child's identity. Instead SACS recommends focussing on the behaviour rather than the person. They also emphasize the importance of reinforcing positive behaviours in violence prevention.

While labelling is problematic, developing an understanding of bullying requires a common language with which to discuss the relevant issues. Thus, terms like *bully*, *perpetrator*, and *victim* have permeated the literature on violence prevention. To maintain consistency with other research and writings on school violence and bullying, I use these same terms throughout this report. However, while I refer to students' positions within bullying incidents as that of *bully* and *victim*, I remain aware of the problem this poses in practice.

## What is Bullying?

Bullying includes physical, verbal, and relational behaviours. While physical behaviours are often the easiest to identify, it is believed that less than one third of bullying actually takes this form (Coloroso, 2003, Olwues, 1993). Most bullying is believed to be verbal, which "dehumanizes the victim making it appear that he or she 'deserves' the abuse" (ATA, 2003, p. 9). The pervasiveness of this type of bullying

recently resulted in the Edmonton municipal legislation that modifies the "Public Places" Act (bylaw no. 7608). The first bullying bylaw of its kind in Canada, this amendment makes repeated non-physical aggression punishable by a fine of up to $250. The bylaw reads as follows:

> (1) No person shall, in any public place or any place to which the public reasonably has access, repeatedly communicate, either directly or indirectly, with any minor in a way that causes the minor, reasonably in all the circumstances, to feel harassed.
>
> In this section:
> "harassed" includes, but is not limited to tormented, troubled, worried, plagued or badgered; and "minor" means an individual under 18 years of age.
>
> (S. 2, Bylaw No. 13308, March 11, 2003)

By giving police the power to ticket repeat offenders off school grounds, this legislation is meant to warn schoolyard bullies that their behaviour will not be tolerated. It is important to understand that this is not an attempt to criminalize student conflict, which remains a healthy part of development. Instead, it aims to acknowledge the damaging effects that continual verbal harassment may have for an individual.

Bullying behaviours have also been categorized as direct and indirect. Direct bullying includes physical and verbal aggression, usually in the form of an 'open assault' or overt, observable attacks directed at another student. Indirect bullying involves behaviours that are more easily concealed, such as teasing, social isolation, exclusion, and gossip (Olweus, 1991; BCEd, 2002).

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project defines bullying as "a repeated pattern of unprovoked, aggressive behaviours carried out by an individual or group that results in harm to someone" (ATA, 2003, p. 9). Dan Olweus, one of the most prominent researchers on bullying, defines it more generally as repeated exposure to any negative actions from one or more students (Olweus, 1993). Both sources agree that not all antagonistic acts are bullying. As such, a clear understanding of bullying behaviours is

necessary to identify and target them. For hostility to be appropriately labelled bullying, certain characteristics should be present. Olweus (1993) identifies three conditions to differentiate bullying behaviours from other forms of aggression. First, a power imbalance exists between the victim and the bully. Bullies have "a strong need for power and dominance; they seem to enjoy being 'in control' and need to subdue others" (Olweus, 1993, p. 35). On the other hand, conflict between two children of equal status within the classroom hierarchy would not constitute bullying. In these cases, aggression is based on a particular incident or personal differences, but not on one student's dominance over the other. Second, the behaviour must occur with some frequency, so as to distinguish it from a random incident. While a physical fight between an aggressive, authoritarian student and an obviously smaller, weaker, more docile one can certainly be classified as violent, it does not constitute bullying without the threat of occurring repeatedly. Lastly, the perpetrator must have the intent to harm the subject. In fact, bullies appear to derive pleasure from inflicting pain and suffering on their victims (Coloroso, 2003; Sheras, 2002). This is an important distinguishing factor, as children often are not aware of the impact their actions have on others.

These characteristics of bullying can serve to assist educators to more accurately recognize bullying, while at the same time preventing the reduction of all challenging behaviours to this label. Conflict is a normal, healthy part of growing up (Coloroso, 2003). Thus, the danger of over-identifying all seemingly aggressive student behaviours as bullying is also a concern. Children who are inhibited from acting out natural assertiveness, or from getting into occasional arguments, will come to view conflict as unnatural and something to be avoided. They will inadvertently learn that their own feelings do not count and that they need to be suppressed. The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project stresses the importance of giving aggressive children opportunities to empathize with others. By reflecting on the feelings of others, encouraging students to share their opinions, teaching children how to make restitution, and allowing for positive interpersonal interactions, adults can prompt children to consider how their actions affect others (ATA, 2003). Of course, teaching ways of managing conflict non-violently does not preclude children from dealing with conflict and aggression. It merely provides them

with the tools necessary to manage disagreements confidently and in their best interest, while treating others with respect and dignity. By observing and reflecting on appropriate methods of solving interpersonal problems, students learn socially acceptable approaches to conflict resolution.

## The Extent of Bullying in Canada

Only recently has bullying gained the shared awareness of schools, communities, politicians, and academics. Not long ago, adults explained discord among children not only as natural (boys will be boys) or harmless (sticks and stones can break your bones but names will never hurt you) but sometimes even as functional, rationalizing aggression among children as building character or teaching them to stand up for themselves. Contrary to these clichés, there is now research to convince even the most hardened sceptics that, while conflict among children is indeed normal, bullying is not healthy nor beneficial in any way. In fact, bullying is now believed to have potentially far-reaching effects not only for the victim, but also for the bully, the bystanders, and society in general (Coloroso, 2003; Flannery, 1997; NCPS, 2002; Steinhauer, 1996).

In the past decade, several studies have attempted to document the incidence of violence in Canadian schools. Many have found school violence to be a pervasive phenomenon. Of almost 1000 junior and senior high school students surveyed in Calgary, approximately 37% reported that they had been slapped or kicked, 42% had been threatened, and 56% had had something stolen (Smith, Bertrand, & Hornick, 1995). Another Calgary study found over one quarter of elementary students had experienced physical and verbal bullying (Beran & Tutty, 2002). In a study of 850 Ontario students in grades 6-9, 45% reported that there was *some* to *a lot* of violence in their schools, and 29% said that they felt safe *sometimes* or *not at all* while at school (Ryan, Matthews, & Banner, 1993). A study by Macdonald (1995) found that over 50% of the 231 junior high school students surveyed had experienced physical forms of violence in their school. In a study investigating bullying in elementary school playgrounds in Toronto, Craig & Pepler

(1997) observed approximately one incident every seven minutes. They calculated that 12% of the children were bullied by 20% of their peers.

Other studies have gone further, exploring feelings about bullying. One found that most students wished bullying didn't happen and over 80% reported that it is unpleasant to watch peers being bullied (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Most also felt support for the victim or anger against the bully but did not want to get involved (Pepler & Craig, 2000). In earlier research, Pepler & Craig (1997) found that about 15% of students reported being severely stressed by peer abuse. In an Alberta study, over 50% of junior high school students surveyed responded that bullying was a *big* or *very big* problem (Macdonald, 1995).

International studies on bullying corroborate Canadian findings. A large scale Norwegian study found approximately nine percent of students reported they were victims of bullying at least occasionally (Olweus, 1993). While this may seem like a relatively low amount, the nine percent in this study actually represented approximately 52,000 of the 568,000 respondents. Studies from England identify approximately 10% of school-aged children as bullies, and about 20% as victims (as cited in ATA, 2003), suggesting an even higher incidence of bullying.

Other studies illustrate the growing fear resulting from the perception that school violence is increasing over the years. For example, in a survey of school boards and police departments across Canada, 80% of respondents felt that violence had increased over the past ten years (Gabor, 1995). Similarly, surveys of teachers in British Columbia (British Columbia Teachers' Federation [BCTF], 1994), Ontario (Ontario Teachers Federation [OTF], 1991), Alberta (ATA, 1992), Manitoba (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 1993), and Nova Scotia (Robb, 1993) indicate that violence is of increasing concern in Canadian schools. In fact, an Environics poll revealed that violence was the top educational concern, even surpassing academic standards (MacDougall, 1993). Research exploring student perceptions of school violence have obtained similar results (MacDonald, 1997).

## Bullies and Victims, Bystanders and Peacemakers

In the media, bullying is often discussed as a dichotomy involving the powerful perpetrator and the weaker victim. Rarely does attention extend past these two actors. In discussing violence prevention, however, it is not enough to focus interventions solely on the two obvious roles. While many children might never play the role of bully, or feel the despondency of the victim, most will witness bullying at least occasionally (BCEd, 2002; MacDonald, 1995; Pepler & Craig, 2000). For this reason, it is important to recognize that all students have the potential to prevent bullying, whether or not they are intimately involved in any violent episode.

In realizing that approximately 85% of bullying episodes are witnessed by peers (Craig & Pepler, 1997), researchers have more closely explored the roles that bystanders play in these situations. Just as certain social experiences can influence children to be aggressive, or indifferent to others' pain, other encounters can build the empathy and confidence necessary to intervene in bullying incidents. This is the goal of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, and other violence prevention initiatives. Motivated by the belief that bullies, victims, bystanders, and peacemakers all have a role to play in preventing violence (ATA, 2003), SACS stresses the importance of encouraging all students to:

- understand the difference between tattling and reporting bullying,
- include others in activities and games,
- understand when a situation is dangerous so they can seek immediate help,
- stand up for others,
- become peacemakers, and
- break the code of silence if they know someone is being hurt.

(ATA, 2003, p. 15)

### *The Bully*

The most visible role is that of the bully. Responsible for the damaging behaviour, bullies are aggressive and lack empathy for the victim (Suderman, Jaffe, & Schieck,

1996). These children typically possess limited skills in managing conflict within interpersonal relationships, often processing social information inaccurately. This leads bullies to attribute antagonistic intentions to others, and to perceive hostility where it does not exist, which in turn leads to anger and aggression (Selman, 1997). They often come from homes where there is poor supervision, and where aggressive behaviour is either modelled or tolerated (Suderman et al., 1996). Interestingly, studies show that bullies usually have excessive confidence (Olweus, 1993; Suderman et al., 1996), contradicting the common belief that people who bully suffer from low self-esteem.

Behaviour that can be characterized as bullying often begins at an early age. Children as young as two and three years old have been reported by pre-school teachers as displaying bullying behaviour (Fried & Fried, 1996). Contrary to clichés which espouse bullying as just a phase or something kids will grow out of, without intervention, "these early patterns of behaviour tend to remain constant or escalate rather than recede as the child gets older" (Olweus, 1991). While bullying by young children often involves pushing, name calling, and teasing, these behaviours often change form as children age, and can develop into sexual harassment, gang attacks, and dating violence in teenagers (NCPS, 2002). For this reason, research on individual behaviours emphasizes the importance of early and ongoing intervention strategies in reducing these behavioural problems and preventing their escalation into criminal activity. In one study, Farrington (1991) concluded that 70-90% of adult violent offenders had been highly aggressive when young. In 1993, Horner found that over 75% of adults in prison had been repeat offenders as children. Approximately 60% of males who had been described as bullies in grades six to nine had at least one conviction by the time they were 24; 35-40% had three or more convictions (Olweus, 1993). Other studies suggest that the likelihood a young offender will remain criminally active in adulthood increases with the severity and extent of the juvenile crime record (Gabor, 1986; Loeber, 1991). Generally, manifestations of bullying behaviour in adulthood take the form of assaults, marital violence, child abuse, workplace harassment, and senior abuse (NCPS, 2002). Thus, there is significant evidence to illustrate the progression of bullying into more serious, criminal activity.

With the unmistakable relationship between childhood bullying and violence, criminal activity, and sexual harassment in later years (Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 2000), the societal implications for preventing violent behaviour in children are overwhelming. Indeed, violence prevention is vital not just in stopping children from being victimized, or society from becoming more violent. It is necessary for the bullies themselves. Children who exhibit aggression, bullying, coercion, disobedience, or generally negative interactions with others "are at risk for a host of negative outcomes including school drop-out, vocational adjustment problems, drug and alcohol abuse, relationship problems, and higher hospitalization and mortality rates" (Kamps, 2002, p. 13). While the behaviours of bullies certainly affect the lives of family, friends, schoolmates, teachers, coworkers, and acquaintances, SACS is based on the belief that caring adult and peer intervention can reduced bullying behaviours by over 50% (ATA, 2003; Olweus, 1991).

***The Victim***

In contrast to the characteristically outspoken bully, victims tend to be quiet and passive, with few friends (Olweus, 1993). They are often insecure and ashamed, which precludes them from telling an adult about being bullied and results in ineffective response to the aggressive actions of others (Pepler & Craig, 1997). Typically excessively cautious and sensitive, these students tend to withdraw from confrontations due to a strong fear. "Children who are bullied often develop a negative view of school, and eventually their in-school achievement suffers" (BCEd, 2002, p. 25). Other researchers have confirmed that repeated bullying can cause psychological distress in victims, and can eventually lead to other related mental and physical health problems (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993).

There are several signs that may indicate a child is experiencing violence. A child MAY be a victim of bullying at school if he or she has developed:

- a fear of going to school,
- nightmares and disturbed sleep,
- problems with school work,

- low self esteem,
- injuries,
- a difficult and argumentative demeanor, or
- a withdrawn or depressive state.

(Pepler & Craig, 2000)

Alternatively, children may send more obvious messages to parents or teachers, such as complaining that others are picking on him/her. Any sign that bullying may be occurring should warrant immediate attention. Along with other proponents of violence prevention, the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project strongly encourages teachers and parents to take any complaint or indication of possible bullying behaviour seriously (ATA, 2003; BCEd, 2002; Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1993).

A smaller group of victims has been referred to as the provocative victim (Olweus, 1993). These students often display behaviour that tends to provoke negative attention. Considered by other students to be hyperactive, annoying, or aggressive, this child is more likely to be perceived as "asking for it" if bullied. Even teachers and parents can be convinced that the provocative victim is to blame for the bullying situation. Of course, while possibly inciting a violent attack, these victims should be considered no more to blame for bullying actions against them than passive victims. In order for violence to be effectively prevented, and respect and empathy to be successfully taught, educators, children, and parents alike must deem violence to be harmful and unnecessary regardless of the involved students' reputation or behaviour. Essentially, all forms of violence should be considered inexcusable.

***The Bystander***

As with most events in childhood, bullying can teach children many lessons. Unfortunately, the use of power and aggression is the primary lesson of bullying (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Without adult intervention, repercussions are absent, and children learn that aggressive individuals earn power and status devoid of any consequences. The bully's control is reinforced through attention from others, lack of opposition, imitation,

and deference (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Pepler & Craig (2000), and others (Farrington, 1991; Flannery, 1997; Steinhauer, 1996) express concern that more serious forms of violence may develop in these children throughout adolescence and into adulthood. Conversely, along with the pain and distress that comes with being bullied, "victims may learn helplessness, submissiveness and negative means of gaining attention from peers" (Pepler & Craig, 2000, p. 8).

Unfortunately, the message sent by a bullying incident influences more than the victim and bully. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is inappropriate to discuss the effects of bullying only in terms of bullies and victims. Just as one might be disturbed by witnessing a parent hurting their child, anyone who observes the damaging effects of a bullying incident is likely to be affected somehow. Whether as fear, anger, helplessness, pity, or envy of power, bystanders take something away. This message may end up shaping their principles. Especially for children who are still developing their value systems and constructing their own meaning of right and wrong, making sense of a bullying situation may lead them to believe that this type of behaviour is acceptable and useful for getting one's way. Witnesses who are not violent themselves may "learn to align with the dominant individual for protection and status" (Pepler & Craig, 2000, p. 8).

Not only are peers influenced *by* bullying, but the same paper confirms the important role that peers can play *in* a bullying situation, either as positive influences preventing the victimization, or as negative influences contributing to the aggression (Pepler & Craig, 2000). In fact, Pepler & Craig found peers to assume many roles in bullying: co-bullies, supports, audience, and interveners. Some bystanders are drawn into the excitement of aggressive interactions, learning to blame the victim while increasing their likelihood of becoming apathetic to aggression or becoming violent themselves. On the other side of the spectrum lie approximately 11% of students who actually intervene to prevent bullying if they see it occurring (Pepler & Craig, 2000). However, these researchers caution that "without guidance … (students) are just as likely to intervene aggressively as prosocially. A focus of intervention, therefore, is to teach the children appropriate ways to handle the situation" (p. 9).

Teaching all children the skills with which to intervene in a bullying incident, and instilling in them the sense of empathy, responsibility, and self confidence necessary to intervene is also crucial because adults rarely witness bullying. Even though the majority of bullying seems to occur on school grounds (Pepler et al., 1998), or inside the school building (Olweus, 1993), teachers are relatively unaware of individual student involvement in bullying episodes (Olweus 1991; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach 1993; Sharpe & Smith, 1994). One Canadian study suggests that teachers see about 4% of bullying in their classrooms and 10% on the playground (Pepler & Craig, 1997). Generally, students report a much higher rate of bullying than what teachers and parents perceive (Olweus, 1991; Fried & Fried, 1996), and while 71% of teachers reported that they usually intervene in bullying problems, only 25% of students felt this was true (Charach et al., 1995). This means that while most teachers believe they do become involved in student disputes in order to stop bullying, most incidents appear to go unnoticed according to students' perceptions. Coupled with the fact that peers are present in approximately 85% of bullying episodes on the playground and in the class (Craig & Pepler, 1997), these statistics show how the potential role of the bystander as informer or peacemaker becomes critical.

Consequently, targeting the bystanders is one main focus of the SACS Project. Each member of a school and its surrounding community can be a potential influence on the reduction or intensification of violence (ATA, 2003). While the peer group is often overlooked in favour of focussing exclusively on the victim, and more often, the bully, bystanders should be seen as 'the supporting cast' of a bullying episode (ATA, 2003). Whether passive spectators or encouraging accomplices, bystanders can fuel the bullying by providing their support and approval. Conversely, bystanders can defend the targeted student, deflect aggression, distract the bully, or tell an adult about the incident (ATA, 2003; Coloroso, 2003; Sheras, 2002). For these reasons, the SACS Project regards bystanders as "the most influential group in determining whether or not bullying behaviour continues" (ATA, 2003, p. 20). Disappointingly however, this power often exists in vain as the code of silence governs most students who witness a bullying situation. Several reasons may dictate students' refusal to act:

- fear of retaliation,
- belief that tattling is a sign of weakness,
- feeling that adults will not do anything, or
- a simple lack of interest in helping the victim.

(ATA, 2003, p. 15)

In convincing children to feel confident and justified in notifying an adult about such behaviour, it is important to emphasize the difference between tattling and telling. Telling is essential for getting someone *out* of trouble, especially since such a small percentage of teachers and parents are witness to actual bullying (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Tattling, on the other hand, is to get someone *into* trouble. It is crucial that children understand the importance of telling an adult when they or someone else is not safe (ATA, 2003).

***The Peacemaker***

The fourth potential actor in a bullying episode is the peacemaker. Empathy, compassion, and respect for diversity have taught this student to believe that "helping and protecting others, especially those who are weaker, is the *right thing* to do" (ATA, 2003, p. 15, emphasis in original). SACS characterizes peacemakers as children who:

- take a stand to protect the victim,
- have the social skills that allow them to diffuse confrontations,
- have the ability to manage anger and resolve conflicts peacefully,
- understand the difference between tattling and reporting, and
- are willing to report bullying to adults.

(ATA, 2003, p. 15)

Unfortunately, peacemakers seem to constitute the smallest group. One study found 22% of elementary students self-identify as peacemakers (Brown, Arbus, Harris, & Kearns, 1996). In another, 11% reported they "almost always tried to stop bullying" (Pepler & Craig, 2000, p. 9). When they do intervene, students were found to be successful in stopping bullying about half the time (Pepler & Craig, 2000).

While a relatively small number of children seem to have the skills and resolve to stop bullying, schools should be motivated by the fact that the ideals these children hold can be nurtured in all individuals. These values are not necessarily inherent, and thus can be developed and encouraged. The skills that peacemakers hold can be taught and reinforced at school, at home, and in the community (ATA, 2003; Berman, 1997; Sheras, 2002).

Not surprisingly, one aim of the ATA's SACS Project is to create peacemakers out of all students. By encouraging students to speak up against violence, adults can begin developing responsible approaches to helping students become peacemakers. This can be done by teaching conflict resolution skills and promoting empathy, respect, and responsibility. Through the existing curriculum, promotion of positive adult role models and establishment of a safe environment can nurture these values in students. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2002) acknowledges that "providing the skills and confidence to the silent majority plays a significant role in halting bullying behaviour by the minority. If active intervention by all members of the school community in bullying situations is valued and encouraged, students are more likely to challenge bullying behaviours than remain inactive" (p. 27).

## Root Causes of Violence

Just as socially acceptable behaviours are learned by following rules, emulating adults, and interacting with peers, inappropriate behaviours also do not just appear by chance. Certain conditions, either environmental (Flannery, 1997; Steinhauer, 1996) or biological (Day et al., 1995; Kamps, 2002), contribute to a child's propensity for violence. However, while organic problems have occasionally been found to affect an individual's demeanor, the American Psychological Association has concluded that for the majority of violent individuals, behaviour is learned (APA, 1993).

Upon examining numerous studies on the individual characteristics of bullies and the social contexts in which bullying occurs, it is apparent that many factors contribute to the

development of bullying behaviours. Several of the potential causes of violent behaviour relate to a child's living situation. Factors such as poverty, family violence, racism, childhood trauma, substance abuse, and inconsistent or excessive discipline practices (RESOLVE, 2002) are the result of a child's home environment and are beyond the education system's control. However, several other factors contributing to the manifestation of violent behaviours can be addressed by schools and communities. For example, the absence of healthy relationships within a child's life, the absence of a value system, and the lack of skills to manage stress and conflict are obvious areas where schools can intervene. Addressing these issues can help teachers to lay the foundation for a non-violent lifestyle (Kamps, 2002; RESOLVE, 2002).

In some cases, bullying appears to be a means by which children attempt to fit in with their peers. When asked why students bully, the two most popular responses were *to be cool* (63%) and *to feel powerful* (58%) (Pal & Day, 1991). Burke (1999) agrees that the desire to be accepted by others often drives students to act irrationally. Especially when children do not have a close relationship with their parents or another caregiver, they are more likely to be negatively influenced by peers.

According to the World Health Organization's report on violence and health (Mercy, Butchart, Farrington, & Cerda, 2002), youth involvement with delinquent peers, poor academic achievement, and early academic failure can also increase the probability of violence during adolescence and young adulthood. Other research has corroborated that poor school performance, coupled with a weak bond to the school, leads to student misbehaviour in school (Slee, 1995; Steinhauer, 1996). Not surprisingly, disciplinary action by school staff follows, which in turn leads to an escalation of misbehaviour through elementary and secondary school, an even higher level of adolescent delinquency, and subsequently, an increase in the rate of adult offending.

That violent behaviour is learned has tremendous implications not only for understanding risk factors, but also for addressing violence intervention and prevention in schools. For many children with these risk factors, life in school and life at home are

completely contradictory. In these cases, schools can function as a stabilizing force in these students' lives, becoming the one place where they can feel safe and nurtured. Just one positive influence in a child's life can make him/ her resistant to harmful influences. Thus, with effort, schools can serve to counter the negative influences in students' lives. A nurturing environment where adaptive behaviours are modelled, and fair and consistent discipline is used can help to ensure that all students develop productive relationships and appropriate behaviour, and demonstrate achievement in school (ATA, 2003; Kamps, 2002; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

## Violence Prevention

In the past few decades, the movement towards violence prevention has gained momentum locally as well as on the global stage. Internationally, the transition from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace was identified by the 28th General conference of UNESCO in 1995 as a major goal for upcoming years. Three years later, a resolution for a culture of peace was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations declared the year 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace and 2001-2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. In keeping with this goal, UNESCO developed eight areas of action necessary for the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace. The first of these, "Culture of Peace through Education", declares education to be the only effective means for ending violence. These activities signal a turning point in the international community's attitude towards violence and emphasize the urgency of immediate action toward change.

### *Canadian Initiatives in Violence Prevention*

In 1998, the Canadian Federal Government launched the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention [NCPS] to fund projects addressing crime and its root causes. Based on early intervention approaches to crime prevention and community safety, it supports grass-roots responses to violence, school problems, and abuse. Priority areas include school safety, conflict, and bullying. Under this national

policy, the Crime Prevention Partnership program supports the development of information, tools, and resources that facilitate community participation, and the Business Action Program promotes and supports business and professional associations to become involved in corporate-community partnership projects that aim to reduce crime and improve community safety. Over 2000 projects have been initiated by this National initiative thus far, over one hundred of which have specifically targeted bullying (NCPS, 2003).

One example has been a national anti-bullying campaign that aims to educate the public about the damaging effects of bullying. Introduced in 2002, this multi-year, multi-media initiative plans to produce three public education campaigns, each highlighting the importance of involving fellow students, parents, and the greater community in preventing bullying.

## Characteristics of Violence Prevention Programs

As youth in contemporary society contend with increasingly complex issues, the education system faces mounting pressure to address the growing number of student problems and behaviours. Roles of school staff have expanded beyond that of teacher to social worker, psychologist, and counsellor. Teaching appropriate socialization, conflict resolution, and coping skills, which has historically been the responsibility of the home, is now falling on the schools. With their significant role in the overall social development of students, teachers and administrators must critically examine the structure and policies of modern schools, and how these function to constrain progress toward a more open and supportive democratic society. Unfortunately, despite the need for school improvement to address the growing responsibilities teachers face, the education system has remained firmly embedded within the individualistic, competitive mind-set that has shaped its development (Berman, 1997; Kohn, 1992).

In the wake of the growing focus on violence, many schools have adopted violence prevention and anti-bullying programs. At times, it might even seem as though

the supply of these programs has surpassed demand as violence prevention has reached a "flavour of the month" status within many school boards. However, evaluations of many anti-violence programs have demonstrated significant improvements in school atmosphere, student behaviour, and even in academic outcomes (Bierman & Greenberg, 1996; Brown et al., 1996; MacDougall, 1993; Olweus, 1991). Even so, most studies and program assessments stress the complexity of successfully creating school improvement capable of influencing the entire school atmosphere. Canadian researchers have examined the challenges and barriers faced in program implementation, resulting in a better understanding of which features are essential for successful change.

Based on his model for the prevention of delinquency, prepared for the National Crime Prevention Council, Steinhauer (1996) lists several school characteristics necessary for improving developmental outcomes in students:

- high but achievable academic and behavioural expectations,
- mutual respect and respect for learning,
- structure,
- enrichment,
- teacher commitment in supporting students to meet expectations,
- teacher involvement with students, and
- the school and community working together.

These attributes must be embedded within the culture of the school for all school members to experience the benefits (Steinhauer, 1996).

The research institute RESOLVE (2002) adds to Steinhauer's inventory of essential components in their evaluation of several prevention programs across North America. This resulting report emphasizes the use of a multi-dimensional approach combining individual, classroom, school-wide, and community initiatives with students, school staff, and parents. Programs should begin prevention efforts at an early age and must establish continuity by incorporating age-appropriate cognitive, affective, and behavioural components throughout all grade levels. Active participation by all students

and school staff in non-violent conflict resolution lessons must be supported fully by school administration. Finally, school policies and procedures should be revised to more effectively and consistently deal with violent incidents (RESOLVE, 2002).

Both assessments reveal the complexity involved in ensuring the successful implementation of any violence prevention program. Several methods must be utilized, within a multitude of conditions in order to effect a positive change in the school atmosphere. These elements are corroborated by numerous studies. In the following section, I examine research findings that support these important characteristics and I discuss them in terms of the Safe and Caring Schools philosophy and objectives.

***An Integrated, School-Wide Approach***

Widely documented as a crucial element, integration within the academic curriculum and within the school's day to day activities permits appropriate social skills to be promoted and practiced across various subjects, and built upon in each successive grade. The whole-school approach entails the involvement of all school staff, thereby ensuring that every school member is committed to the goals of the school improvement. When all personnel become involved in learning new knowledge and honing effective communication skills, positive behaviours are more likely to be reinforced consistently by all adults (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001).

SACS advocates for the integration of safe and caring principles into teachers' practice and across all facets of a child's life. The Project contends that this will teach children to apply these values to various situations (ATA, 1997). Indeed, schools that integrate violence prevention programs across the entire curriculum and focus on communication, respecting difference, and learning self-control skills are successful at achieving positive effects (Casella & Burstyn, 2002, MacDougall, 1993; Olweus, 1993). For example, in a conflict resolution program that focused on accepting and respecting difference, self-control skills, and communication, educators saw positive effects in school climate (Cochrane & Saroyan, 1997). Teachers commented that students were more respectful, listened better, and demonstrated an increase in self-control and the use

of conflict resolution skills. Students reported an increase in self-confidence. The researchers attributed these outcomes to the integrated approach of the conflict resolution program, stating "add-on programs are limited by the perception of marginal status compared to the core programs" (p. 19). As well, integrated strategies, which by definition are designed to adapt to each subject, tend to focus on teaching methods rather than extra content, in the end making them less work than add-on programs.

Bickmore (1998) found that integrating conflict education and conflict resolution skills across the curriculum allowed the educator to "improve students' capacities to generalize and to transfer school knowledge to new uses" (p. 4). In engaging the class in discussions and encouraging them to relate material to their own experiences, the program allowed students to construct their own understanding of conflict and the importance of peaceful resolution. Bickmore concluded that it is necessary to integrate conflict resolution into academic curriculum in order to "build in multiple applications of concepts, and extend developmental time, to improve students' capacities to generalize and to transfer school knowledge to new uses" (p. 4). In addition, including controversial and complex examples enhanced the learning by providing multiple representations and "many entry points for understanding each main idea" (p. 20).

***Teacher Awareness, Involvement, and Professional Development***

Not only is the active and informed involvement of teachers vital to any effective school change, but it is also central to the principles underpinning the notion of whole-school approach. In order to achieve this level of teacher involvement, school administration must set up the support structure necessary to facilitate teacher participation and contribution. "Teachers need substantial long-term support to learn about violence prevention and conflict resolution theory and practices so that they become comfortable using them daily in their interactions with each other and with their students" (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001, p. 145). With professional development, school staff will develop competence and confidence in implementing new ideas. Continuous support through regular meetings and discussions can help to ensure that the objectives of the proposed change remain a priority for all.

This concept may seem obvious. However, in their focussed attempts to improve student social skills, violence prevention programs may run the risk of concentrating exclusively on students without concurrently addressing adult behaviour. Indeed, specific teacher support was found to be lacking in many schools across Canada (Day et al., 1995). In fact, only 10% of school policies examined in Alberta included specific protocol stipulating staff development.

Three important issues arise from the absence of complete teacher involvement. First of all, schools must increase the awareness of bullying among the adults before they can begin addressing the issue in students. Canadian studies confirm this necessity, finding school staff "generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization problems" (Pepler & Craig, 2000). After all, teachers cannot stop aggressive incidents and behaviours without first acknowledging that they are actually happening. Unfortunately, many characteristics of bullying add to its elusive nature. Pepler & Craig (2000) speculate that teacher intervention may be uncommon because the majority of bullying episodes are verbal, brief, and tend to occur when monitoring is low.

Secondly, teachers and adults in general must recognize and be committed to their responsibility in creating socially competent citizens. When they realize the power they possess as models, adults can become more adept at using this influence to demonstrate appropriate behaviours to their students, in turn communicating more effectively themselves. However, this requires that teachers be constantly aware of their reactions to aggression, their ability to resolve tensions, and of the possibility of inadvertently modelling inappropriate behaviours. While teachers possess the ability to prevent bullying, their opinions can unintentionally encourage it instead. For example, if a teacher believes and espouses the myths that:

- bullying is a normal part of growing up,
- bullies will eventually grow out of their behaviours,
- children's conflicts cannot result in any real harm, or
- victims of bullying provoke attacks,

students might learn the message that bullying is acceptable (Peplar & Craig, 2000). Simply stated, "unless the adults in the school change their attitudes and behaviour, the students will not" (p. 12).

Third, an increased understanding of the motives for aggression will render teachers more accepting and understanding of their students, and less likely to label them or misinterpret the situation. As a society, I believe we have to change our perception of students with problem behaviours as *bad*. If we begin seeing these students as victims of circumstance, requiring extra care and attention, we will be much more likely to help them and see the good in them. With a new appreciation for student needs, teachers can become more empowered to create a change in students' lives. In fact, researchers in one study found teacher commitment to prevention programs increased once they understood the relationship between students' circumstances, background, behaviour, and academic performance (Day et al., 1995).

Casella and Burstyn (2002) theorize that in order to improve the state of education in general, school staff must learn about the lives of their students. They propose that this would lead to a change in the way teachers think about the students. After one year of program implementation, Casella and Burstyn evaluated a whole-school violence prevention program, the Syracuse University Violence Prevention Project, within an alternative school for weapon policy offenders. Part of this project's integrated approach to violence prevention required that all students take a full year course on prosocial skills and anger management. In addition, conflict resolution strategies were incorporated into the daily academic curriculum. They found that the school staff was almost unanimously in favor of the program, and observed its benefits on a daily basis. Helping students to recognize choices and to understand how to control their behavior were mentioned as positive outcomes of the program. However, the teachers tended to notice the benefits to others without considering the benefits to themselves. Thus, the researchers concluded that one of the problems with many violence prevention programs is the focus on transforming a targeted group without inspiring a coordinated change among the other groups involved--teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents. They speculate that

including all school personnel in violence prevention programs as learners would particularly benefit the students. "The teacher who learns about students–how, for example, they interpret the teacher's rebukes–is a teacher better equipped to work closely with students to improve their hopes for the future" (Casella & Burstyn, 2002, p. 91). They eloquently rationalize that:

> when violence prevention aims to 'fix' students it does not live up to its promises to promote change within the school. To say that a school's ethos or climate can be improved by improving student behaviour is only half the story. Changing the school also means changing the adults who work in it. Violence prevention must up-end the morally superior attitude of many adults who see in students only 'bad choices'. (p. 92)

This is not to put the blame or the entire responsibility on teachers for a program's success or failure. Often programs and policies are instituted without provisions for comprehensive training and consistent support. Some simply lack a component that raises teacher awareness. Day et al. (1995) commented on the absence of guidelines regarding staff development in their cross Canada school policy analysis, noting that "many school boards are missing the consensus-building opportunities that exist when staff are provided with the support needed to familiarize themselves with their board's policies and programs". They identified a need for more staff training opportunities in the areas of school violence and violence prevention, and better methods with which staff can report incidents of school-based violence. Three of the four SACS programs--*Supporting a Safe and Caring School*, *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum*, and *Supporting a Safe and Caring Profession*--offer resources and training to support school staff in effectively implementing the SACS Project in their school (ATA, 1997).

***Addressing Root Causes of Violence***

The SACS Project stresses that bullying behaviours will not ultimately change if the underlying attitudes that individuals use to justify these behaviours are not addressed. A general disrespect for difference, most commonly manifest in the form of racism, sexism, or homophobia, is commonly associated with bullying (ATA, 2003). Thus, "punishing bullies without addressing root causes of their behaviour can actually

reinforce their negative behaviour and justify their willingness to blame others for their punishment" (ATA, 2003).

***Social Skills and Social Responsibility***

As the context for much of the social interaction that children experience, school can function either to inhibit or further the development of socially aware and competent citizens. Mutual respect and social responsibility, conveyed through the use of cooperative behaviour and appropriate social skills, are at the heart of this ideal. Rather than rely on the assumption that all students will learn effective behaviour from the adult conduct they see around them, social skills must be taught specifically. This is particularly important given the vast amount of adults children are influenced by throughout their childhood, and given the inconsistency of skills and behaviours these adults might demonstrate.

Programs designed to improve learning through social skills training among elementary school students have been found to decrease aggression and improve peer interaction (Bierman & Greenberg, 1996). A study examining the effects of direct social skills instruction in regular and special education classrooms observed a positive influence on student interactions (Carlson, Johnson, & Swift, 2000). Student surveys and teacher and researcher observations of behavioural problems indicated a decline in fighting, verbal conflict, and off-task behaviour. In an evaluation of the Second Step violence prevention program, which aims to improve social competence among youth, students were less likely to view aggressive behaviour as justifiable after receiving the program (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, & Beland, 2002).

Berman (1997) lists four basic processes that foster social responsibility and develop a sense of connectedness to others:

(1) A nurturing and caring environment that involves children in decision making and prosocial action;

(2) Modelling prosocial and ethical behaviour by parents, other adults, and peers;

(3) Development of perspective-taking skills; and

(4) Confrontations with injustice and the development of effective ways of handing conflict situations.

As such, schools must go beyond simply teaching prosocial skills to students. Specific effort must be made to facilitate the adaptation and generalization of these skills to the real settings in which children are likely to find themselves. Larson and Lochman (2002) argue that social skills will not be transferred across situations "...without specific generalization guidelines built into the fabric of the intervention" (p. 51). Therefore, explicit procedures "must be integrated into the structure of the intervention at the onset. Too much is at stake in the lives of these children to rely on the 'train and hope' model" (p. 51). For this reason, SACS stresses the importance of involving all adults in any character education and violence prevention endeavours, so skills can be modelled and reinforced across all settings (ATA, 1997). In addition, in its focus on fostering empathy and encouraging students to participate in their own conflict resolution, the Project emphasizes the development of perspective-taking and conflict resolution skills, as Berman's last two points propose.

While effective social skills and the ability to use them across various situations is certainly essential to the promotion of peace, it is important that these emerge out of understanding and out of a sense of responsibility, rather than from simple obedience. Children should be encouraged to see the benefits of interacting cooperatively and supporting others so they come to internalize the values that underlie these actions. In order to develop the values that elicit responsible behaviour, children need to feel empowered and in control of their own behaviour. MacDonald (1998) stresses the importance of imparting self-empowerment within students to encourage "responsibility for regulating their own behaviour, and meaningful opportunities to learn and practice self-discipline" (p. 6). She remarks that models of discipline in the past have generally "focused on monitoring, judging acceptability and punishing when necessary" (p. 6). Instead, schools should be encouraging prosocial skills and teaching practical strategies that children can use to resolve conflict, lessen anxiety, and moderate aggression between others.

Empowerment comes from action. Students need to be active in their own learning and achievement, in how they interact with others, and in making decisions, in order to feel empowered. However, to promote social responsibility, student empowerment must also be tied to the greater good. By supporting empathy while nurturing self-esteem, and by valuing students' self-respect together with respect for others, adults can ensure that student empowerment serves to uphold social responsibility (Berman, 1997).

***Behaviour Policies***

In assessing a school's effectiveness in addressing bullying behaviours and promoting responsible student conduct, it is also important to consider the school's behaviour policy. It is through these guidelines, which establish acceptable disciplinary procedures, that teachers and administrators usually manage all behavioural matters. Several studies point to weaknesses in many of the practices used in current behaviour policies, and highlight their ineffectiveness in deterring inappropriate behaviours among youth. Students given the opportunity to evaluate their school's consequences to misbehaving all felt that suspension, while a common punishment, was not effective (O'Dea & Loewen, 1999). The students who were labelled disruptive especially felt this way. As most common subjects of suspension, these students' views and attitudes toward discipline can help guide behaviour policy revision. Students in an Alberta study considered staff responses to violence to be inconsistent, unfair, and ineffective (MacDonald, 1995). This led MacDonald to conclude that strategies need to "regard discipline as an opportunity to teach students social skills, rather than as a way to punish social illiteracy…(and that students)…need to be given opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them" (abstract).

The 1995 study examining school-based violence prevention policies and programs across Canada indicated "a tremendous amount of activity within the education community to understand and come to terms with the issue of school-based violence and to identify and implement effective solutions" (Day et al., 1995, abstract). However, despite this enthusiasm, most school boards focussed on punishment rather than the

proactive approaches believed to be more effective (ATA, 2003; Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 2000). The researchers analyzed policies by categorizing each submission according to its underlying philosophy. In their sample of 116 school boards' policies, the majority (48.8%) were identified as having a *response/sanctions* focus, popularly characterized as a zero tolerance policy. Thirty percent of the boards had an *expectations for behaviour* approach, while 18.3% had an *intervention/prevention model*. Only 3.7% were classified as using a *community focus* oriented policy. Out of the ten school boards from Alberta, the areas of strongest focus were:

- delegating administrative responsibility (100%),
- suspension/expulsion (90%), and
- communicating policy information to stakeholders (80%).

Interestingly, while 60% of the policies attempted to promote a positive school climate, less than 20% of the policies included guidelines such as:

- alternative-to-suspension programs (20%),
- staff development (10%),
- early/ongoing identification (10%),
- aftermath programs (10%),
- procedures for policy/program evaluation (10%),
- involving committees in policy development (0%),
- conducting incidence surveys (0%), or
- screening curricula for violent content (0%).

which are believed to be essential for creating such an atmosphere (Day et al., 1995).

Not surprisingly, the most frequently occurring component was the almost universal presence of a policy for suspension and expulsion, found in an average of 93.6% of the school boards in each of the nine participating provinces. At a time when school violence and problem behaviour among youth is a primary focus, desperation may drive administrators and teachers to see punishment-oriented approaches as the only solution. Concerns over maintaining order and control in schools often surpass those of creating a respectful and democratic environment (Berman, 1997; Giroux, 1988).

Relying on modelling and encouragement to change inappropriate behaviours may seem tedious, time-consuming, or even futile by school staff looking for a quick fix to a 'bullying problem' and may be substituted by overly restrictive or injudicious punishments. While these methods may deter some school violence, they do not teach young people the right reasons for avoiding violent behaviours nor do they demonstrate the benefits and motives of using peaceful actions. Instead they send the message that teachers and other adults are to be feared. When student violence and resistance is restrained through order and control, students are forced to learn obedience and compliance rather than self-control and respect (Casella, 2001). Not only does this perpetuate the teacher-student power struggle and the adult-in-authority stereotype, but teachers in these situations become susceptible to using aggression themselves, whether it be through threats, intimidation, or force, to continue to maintain order in their classrooms (Casella, 2001).

Unfortunately, the willingness to punish may be a consequence of society's ostensible need for retribution. The education system's resolve to institute zero tolerance policies and rules based on reaction to improper conduct seems to parallel the general public's appeal for more severe punishment for young offenders. The study conducted for the John Howard Society in 1998 found an overwhelming belief among the public that the Young Offenders Act, the Canadian youth justice system, is too lenient and thus powerless in controlling the behaviour of young people. This is a common feeling among adults across Canada. Paradoxically, however, official statistics show penalties for youth are in fact highly punitive compared to punishments for adults, and research consistently supports the use of proactive rather than reactive methods of crime prevention (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; Casella & Burstyn, 2002; Olweus, 1991).

When students were asked what schools should do about violent behaviour, O'Dea & Loewen (1999) found responses to be much different from current school practice. While students surprisingly called for more punishment, doubting the effectiveness of communication on its own as a deterrent, their consequences often included involving parents. Relatively unconcerned about avoiding discipline, most felt

that receiving respect from teachers was as much an incentive to behave as any punishment would be a deterrent for misbehaving (O'Dea & Loewen, 1999). The ATA's SACS Project provides several ideas for responding to bullying in a way that places the responsibility for the behaviour, and correcting it, on the student. Teachers are encouraged to:

- intervene immediately, removing victims and bullies from the scene;
- offer comfort to the victim;
- encourage discussion and sharing of feelings;
- explain why the *behaviour*, not the *person*, is the problem;
- help the accused student make restitution (that both victim and bully agree upon) to the victim for the behaviour;
- involve the families of all concerned; and
- help the victims develop confidence, self-esteem, and effective responses to bullying.

(ATA, 2003)

Once a behaviour policy has been written, measures must be taken to ensure that all teachers understand the protocol and have the support to follow the policy clearly and consistently. Students who engage in aggressive behaviours and disrespect others need to expect, and be met with, a reasonable, predictable consequence. Algozzine & White (2002) encourage consistency in discipline as a way to prevent misbehaviours from escalating into serious school problems. Consistency, they stress, is not just beneficial for students. Teachers "gain competence and confidence" (p. 87) from having procedures that they can turn to and follow, instead of having to create a new punishment each time a student misbehaves. The confidence that teachers communicate through decisive actions will show students that their behaviour is not acceptable, and that this consequence will follow the particular behaviour each time, regardless of the teacher, the student, the time of day, or any other extraneous factor.

***Parental and Community Involvement***

School is only one of many influences on a child, and unfortunately, fair and consistent intervention at school is not enough to prevent all cases of bullying. Since violence does not remain within the confines of school, effort from beyond school walls is necessary to prevent it. Schools must extend the responsibility of addressing violence not only to all staff and students, but to parents, community members, and society in general (ATA, 2003).

Not surprisingly, studies confirm the positive effects of involving parents in school initiatives. Flannery and Torquati (1993) found that teachers believed parental participation via volunteering in the classroom was the biggest factor in determining a new school program's success. In fact, teachers rated parental involvement as more important than administrative support, quality of teacher training, and teacher perception of the program's importance.

Arguably the most difficult element to institute, increasing parental interest and involvement often demands clever and persistent community outreach by school administrators. While most parents are certainly concerned about their children's education, the frequent time and financial restrictions caused by contemporary lifestyles often hinder extensive involvement. This affects a parent's ability to learn about, and appreciate, the benefits of any proposed school improvement.

Conversely, parental participation is often not requested by schools. Many parents may in fact jump at the prospect of improving their child's interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, given the opportunity. A study by Casella and Burstyn (2002) exposed the possibility that parental disconnectedness may be masking an actual desire to be involved. In evaluating a program that included parental outreach through home visits, they found that parents "loved the concept [of home visits], they (felt) support and (were) encouraged that (teachers) really love and care about this child, when, in many previous instances they felt like the child has been given over and neglected, because the child is a pain in the neck" (p. 93). Unfortunately, this also highlights the lengths schools might

have to go to in order to facilitate active parental participation. While parents may appreciate home visits, and students may benefit from them, it is obviously not a feasible solution for most already taxed education systems.

Adding to the problem is the fact that, much like teachers, parents are generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization problems (Pepler & Craig, 2000). This lack of knowledge reduces the likelihood that parents will appreciate the need for a violence-prevention program and become involved. Not surprisingly, however, parents have a distinct role to play in preventing their children from becoming bullies or victims. For example, preschool children whose parents were taught a behavioural program involving instruction, modelling, rehearsal and social reinforcement did as well as children who had been trained by teachers, and children who had received the training from both home and school showed better skills than children taught only at school (Wurtele, Gillespie, Currier, & Franklin, 1992).

Conversely, parents can inadvertently support their child's identity, either as a bully, by modelling the use of power and aggression to achieve a particular outcome and tolerating bullying behaviours at home, or as a victim, by inhibiting their child's independence and social relationships (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Comparable to a teacher's ability to influence the prevalence of bullying, a parent who believes that bullying is a normal part of growing up and tolerates such behaviours at home could be allowing it to continue. Parents may in fact be encouraging bullying episodes by conveying the opinion that children should learn to stick up for themselves. Similarly, parents who feel that children are best left to resolve their own conflicts without guidance may be missing a valuable opportunity to demonstrate respectful behaviour. While children should indeed be given the opportunity to settle their own disputes and defend themselves when necessary, the skills by which to do this must be specifically taught and modeled to them. With guidance, peaceful methods of "sticking up" for oneself could be emphasized over more aggressive reactions. As for growing out of bullying behaviours, research has shown that this is only a myth, as these tendencies were actually found to escalate without the proper interventions (Larson & Lochman, 2002).

Gaining the interest and support of the greater community is also necessary for the effective implementation of a violence prevention program. Since community members interact with children as coaches, neighbours, friends' parents, and business owners, they also have an impact on a child's value system. In fact, interactions with other caring adults become even more critical for children whose parents are absent or providing negative support. Powell (1999) explains the importance of positive adult interaction in the lives of these children:

> External support networks may foster resilience in children by offering consistent and unconditional acceptance, advice, encouragement, and even financial support. Children who rely on well-developed and accessible social support systems fare better when faced with stressful life situations. Where there is family discord, an external network of caring adults is especially important to buffer the effects of family problems. (para. 9)

Central to this point is the child's ability to access available social support systems. Structures need to be in place to facilitate the efficient flow of information between schools and other community organizations. This requires instituting procedures to assist the identification of children in need, both through increasing staff awareness of students' situations, and by providing avenues for safe and comfortable self-identification. Unfortunately, the current state of school-community partnerships is dismal. As mentioned in the previous section, only 3.7% of Canadian school policies examined used what was classified as a "community focus" approach (Day et al. 1995).

## Chapter 3

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study. In keeping with the aim of the research, which was to understand the process teachers use to implement the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project in their classes, action research was used to facilitate teacher control of program progress. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used within the action research approach to obtain an informed picture of the SACS Project implementation and its effect on the school community.

An understanding of action research is provided below, followed by a description of the particular research scenario. I then explain the ethical procedures and the methods of data collection used in this study. I conclude with a description of methods taken to ensure an authentic database was established.

### Action Research

Change is never simply a matter of implementing the right program, especially within a school context. It must be a complex progression in which the whole school community is involved and invested. Action research was chosen as the overlying research methodology in order to facilitate this transformation, rather than just to observe and document it.

The Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers (ATA, 2000a) describes this process as a structured yet adaptable systematic approach to investigating any school issue in order to develop strategies for improvement. Rather than taking an isolated glimpse of two points in time and comparing them, as many forms of research do, action research is the process of "systematically evaluating the consequences of educational decisions and adjusting practice to maximize effectiveness" (McLean, 1995, p. 3). In this way, it invites educators to examine their own teaching practice while encouraging

experimentation with novel approaches. Following employment of a new program, resource, or other innovation, action research can be used by educators to assess the change and establish the affect it had on the students' learning and on the school atmosphere in general. This allows all involved to observe changes and determine if the anticipated improvement did in fact occur. Through a cyclical process of conceptualization, implementation, and interpretation (McLean, 1995), action research requires teachers to remain astutely aware of the effects of their teaching practice and necessitates that they continuous modify their approaches until effective learning strategies are identified. Rather than being restricted to one method of achieving outcomes, action research allows continuous change to take place.

The adaptability of action research comes from its capacity to employ a range of designs and methods (ATA, 2000a). Data collection methods chosen will depend upon the purpose of the research, the intended outcomes, the number of students and staff involved, and what change is being measured. A valuable tool for examining the effects of any new initiative, action research can be applied to educational problems at any level, whether single classroom, whole school, or district, with equal efficiency (McLean, 1995).

Other benefits of action research are equally substantial. Calhoun (1994) notes that this approach "provides opportunities for all actors within the school community to be engaged in group investigation and active problem solving" (p. 34). She maintains that action research supports changes in behaviour by emphasizing individual interactions within groups, claiming that teachers are "more powerful working together as an educational force for (their) students than (they) are working individually" (p. 34). Of course, this requires cooperation among teachers and administrators. The support of all participating staff must be obtained, and a method for offering input and settling disagreement throughout the process should be agreed upon ahead of time (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; Calhoun, 1994).

**Using Action Research with the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project**

I chose action research as the overlying methodology for this study because of its close parallel to the principles underlying SACS values integration. In action research, educators must continuously examine their own teaching practice so they are aware of how it affects students. Likewise, teachers integrating the SACS philosophy must examine and remain aware of their own values and how these are conveyed through their practice. Secondly, both action research and SACS are based on whole school involvement, and thus both stress the importance of cooperation, collective decision-making, and regular discussions (ATA, 2003; Peppard, 1997). As well, both processes are rooted in the notion of school improvement for the sake of the students.

Calhoun (1994) lists six tangible conditions that need to be established to support the successful implementation of action research:

(1) A faculty that seeks a better education for its students,
(2) A public agreement about how collective decisions are made,
(3) A facilitation team willing to lead the research process,
(4) Study groups or liaison groups that meet regularly,
(5) Awareness and understanding of the action research cycle, and
(6) Technical assistance by way of an outsider.

I attempted to create these conditions and to maintain them throughout the process. The first condition was validated at the initial stage of school identification, through staff involvement. With the goal of addressing bullying behaviours and improving the school atmosphere, the junior high teachers from the chosen school agreed to begin implementing the Safe and Caring Schools Project and to participate in my research. The second condition was created through the decision that I would meet with the teachers regularly to discuss the research and the Project progress. Throughout the research process, I attempted to keep the staff informed and involved through meetings

and email updates, inviting input regarding any decision. The facilitation team, in condition three, consisted of myself and a teacher who would lead the process in the school by facilitating communication, research, and SACS Project implementation. This teacher was involved in setting the timeline, developing the action plan, and coordinating meetings and data collection times. Condition four, study groups, existed in the form of teacher meetings. Most junior high teachers were in attendance for each of these gatherings. Awareness and understanding of the research, condition five, was provided at the initial meeting, and additional support was available for any teacher who had concerns or desired more information. Finally, as the researcher, I provided the outsider assistance, not only in conducting the research process, but also in supporting the Project momentum. By regularly presenting research results and inviting the teachers to share their ideas for teaching values and social skills in class, I attempted to maintain the flow of communication, thereby keeping the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project in the minds of the staff.

***The Research Site***

The research was conducted at a junior high school in Edmonton. Being a French immersion school, most of its students are bussed to school from several communities throughout Edmonton. The school has over one hundred junior high students. All seven of the junior high teachers participated in the research, one of whom was also an administrator. This individual volunteered to be the lead teacher in this endeavour.

***Gaining Entry***

The Program Manager from the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project assisted me with the school selection process. Through her delivery of numerous presentations and workshops on bullying in schools and related topics, the program manager was aware of schools that had expressed interest in the SACS Project and in the proposed action research. Since my conditions were specific-- I was interested in conducting my research in either a junior high or high school that had not yet started implementing SACS-- I accepted the first school that had decided to begin implementation and would allow me to conduct the action research.

Once the school administrators expressed interest in participating, the program manager and I met with them to explain how the research could progress. This meeting allowed the administrators to share their ideas and express concerns. In recognizing the benefits of this partnership to both parties, each agreed to work together to create a safer and more caring school environment using the SACS initiative. Following this decision, I began the application process for ethics approval. I first applied for departmental approval to the Research Ethics Board of the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta (see Appendix B). Upon approval, I applied for permission to conduct in-school research from the appropriate school board, through the Cooperative Activities Program. Once permission was obtained from both the University and the school board, I contacted the school about beginning the research.

## Research Ethics

Ethical treatment is always an important consideration when conducting research with human subjects. Following ethical standards ensures that individuals are not intentionally, or inadvertently, placed in situations that involve risks or create harm, frustration, or inconvenience (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Kvale, 1996). In fact, Mertens (1998) warns that "ethics in research should be an integral part of the research planning and implementation process, not viewed as an afterthought or a burden" (p. 23).

In my research, ethical standards followed those jointly specified by the Research Ethics Board of the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, and by the School Board's District Monitoring Department, under the Cooperative Activities Program. These ethical considerations included:

- obtaining informed consent of all participants,
- explaining the purpose and nature of the research,
- communicating the right to opt out to participants,
- ensuring anonymity and confidentiality for all participants and for the school itself, and
- taking all appropriate measures to avoid threat or harm.

Not only did following these principles prevent the participants from being adversely affected by my research, but it served to strengthen the credibility of the study as well (Charles, 1998).

Examining a program with educational and societal benefits, allowing the teachers and administrators to direct the action research, and making sure it did not negatively affect normal classroom activities further helped me to conduct valuable research that was free from risks or harm. In fact, I believe that most participants benefited from involvement in my study. The teachers developed a greater awareness of their own values and how they are being conveyed through their practice. As well, many of the students gained a clearer understanding of prosocial values and became more aware of how their own behaviour affects others.

***Confidentiality***

The anonymity and confidentiality of the school, its students, and teachers was guaranteed on all the consent forms signed by the participants (see Appendices D, F, & G). All names and identifying details of the school and participants remained confidential. No students or teachers were referred to by name in this text, or in any other material produced as a result of this research, maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of both the school and the individuals involved.

Only students who returned a signed parental consent form to the school, and who consented themselves, participated in the study. Participation in surveys and interviews, and whether students were tape-recoded during the interview, depended upon the consent they forwarded. For interviews, names of those students who had consented were drawn randomly. New students were selected in place of students who were absent on the days when interviews were being conducted.

All notes and tapes were kept secure and I was the only person with access to this data. All notes will be destroyed upon completion of this report, and all tapes will be erased.

## Research Methods

I used surveys to obtain quantitative data from both teachers and students. While surveys characteristically cannot probe deeply into respondents' views and insights, they can be used to inquire about attitudes, feelings, and experiences in order to determine trends and compare findings (Gall et al., 1996). For this study, quantitative data were used to provide a general idea of staff and student perceptions of the school environment, and to establish baseline information, which allowed for the comparison of data collected following one school year of Project implementation. The initial quantitative results also allowed participants to identify school needs, shaping the particular objectives of school improvement.

Interviews were used to supplement the information obtained from the surveys. Gall et al. (1996) suggest using interviews for their adaptability and for the depth of the information they have the potential of accessing. "Skilled interviewers can follow up a respondent's answer to obtain more information and clarify vague statements. They can also build trust and rapport with respondents, thus making it possible to obtain information that the individual probably would not reveal by any other data-collection method" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 289). Interviews were conducted with students, while qualitative data from teachers were collected through my participation in meetings, which essentially paralleled a focus group approach. Both of these methods allowed for more open, less structured student and teacher feedback that could not be effectively captured through a survey, where responses are limited. A deeper, more nuanced view of student and teacher experiences was achieved through the interviewee's capacity to direct the conversation and expand on individual responses, and through the researcher's ability to tailor questions to previous responses and to follow up on interesting comments or vague

replies (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). Coupled with a more personal, intimate setting, the flexibility that interviews offered helped me gain a broader sense of the Project's effects.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. Themes were generated based on questions asked during interviews and topics that students or teachers reported repeatedly. The overlying themes were:

- bullying incidents,
- student behaviour,
- adult behaviour,
- conflict resolution skills, and
- the school's behavioural policy.

These topics are reflected as sections and subsections within the chapters on teacher data analysis (chapter four) and student data analysis (chapter five). These themes were further broken down to illustrate perceived changes in each as a result of the SACS Project. While I noted the number of particular responses for each theme, I was mainly concerned with the content of the interviews, and the insights that arose within each theme. For the quantitative data, pre-test and post-test surveys were compiled to yield percentages. Pre and post-test percentages were then compared to detect changes in student perceptions.

***Teacher Surveys***

A short survey (see Appendix C) was administered to the seven junior high teachers during the initial teacher meeting. The purpose of this survey was to discover the teachers' initial feelings about implementing the SACS Project and working together. This information served to help define the focus of the action research, as recommended by the ATA's action research manual (ATA, 2000a). The results of the teacher survey provided staff with a better understanding of collective concerns and needs, thus identifying which issues they should address to facilitate successful Project implementation. Consent forms were signed by the teachers prior to data collection (see Appendix D).

***Student Surveys***

The SACS assessment tool (see Appendix E) was used to obtain quantitative data from the students. Based on over three years of research and field testing, the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project developed this instrument as a way to "identify strengths and areas for taking action associated with initiatives to make schools safer and more caring" (ATA, 2000b, p. 23). The primary intent of the survey is to give a voice to the students, allowing for their input into the proposed school improvement. In this way, students are given the opportunity to share their perceptions of the school experience, identifying what the school is doing well and what issues require more attention. This method served to further define the focus of the action research process by providing input regarding school issues.

The goal of the SACS Project is to promote "practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviours so that learning and teaching take place in a safe and caring environment" (ATA, 1997). SACS contends that this will occur in a school which possesses the common attributes of a safe and caring school, as laid out in the SACS Project pamphlet. Shared by all safe and caring schools, each of these six attributes (explained in detail in the Needs Assessment section of chapter four) relate directly to a set of questions in the survey. These school characteristics "provide direction for the development, implementation and evaluation of school principles, policies, programs, and practices" (ATA, 1997).

Students were given consent forms to take home for their parents or guardians to sign (see Appendix F). All students who received consent from their parents and who consented themselves (see student consent form, Appendix G) wrote the survey first in October and then again in May. In total, 64 junior high students wrote the pre-test survey (12 grade nine students, 18 grade eight students, and 34 grade seven students). 57 students wrote the post-test survey in May (12 grade nine students, 17 grade eight students, and 28 grade seven students).

***Teacher Meetings***

I met with the junior high staff four times throughout the course of the school year, for approximately one to two hours. While these meetings were similar to focus groups, they were less structured and teachers were not required to participate in the discussion. Staff often directed the conversation and used the information provided from the data collection methods to determine the subsequent course of action. Each meeting had a different focus, depending on the stage of the research. Generally I asked one or two questions enquiring into the progress of the SACS Project implementation and student reactions to these activities. Meetings ensured the action research proceeded by giving teachers the opportunity to share ideas, reflect on practice, and plan new activities. As well, they provided the chance for teachers to collectively analyze the data collected and to decide what action would be taken to address any newly arising issues. On several other occasions, I met with the lead teacher to plan the process, coordinate data collection methods, and discuss results and Project progress.

Data from these meetings were recorded manually, and were analysed to determine which teaching strategies were employed to promote SACS values and how effective these were in encouraging mutual respect and responsibility in students. I used teacher perceptions of student behaviour and of their own changing awareness and actions to establish which changes had occurred in the school.

***Needs Assessment***

Despite the seemingly universal movement towards a major transformation within the traditional education system, most schools are generally very caring, secure places in need of minor changes (Shaw, 2001). Thus, schools intent on implementing a new program or initiating some improvement should begin with an initial assessment of their current conditions within the school. Instructing school staff to consider present practices, inconsistencies, and strengths will help to develop a more effective strategy (Flannery, 1997). Especially given that each school possesses its own unique issues, tensions, and strengths, strategies for improvement must be sensitive to the school's particular situation (Halsall, 1998).

A needs assessment activity was conducted during the first teachers meeting to identify issues and assets specific to this school. As with the initial surveys, this process helped to focus the action research process, and thus the particular goals for school improvement. In addition, it provided a means for comparing what was accomplished by the end of the year to what had been intended. The list of attributes that the SACS Project considers to be shared by all safe and caring schools guided this exercise, which is described in more detail in chapter four. Teachers were asked to note particular activities and methods used in their school that they felt contributed towards maintaining a safe and caring atmosphere. They were also required to list issues in their school that warranted closer attention. School-specific objectives, meant to direct SACS Project implementation, were then based on these identified needs.

***Student Interviews***

Interviews were used as another way to guide the action research process. Teachers used student interview data to assess student understanding and to identify which changes were taking place as a result of the SACS values integration. This helped to maintain the cyclical development of action research by promoting continuous action.

To determine who would be interviewed, I drew names randomly from all the students who had received parental consent to participate in the interviews (see parental consent form, Appendix F), and who had consented themselves (see student consent form, Appendix G). I interviewed nine students in total--five females and four males. Three students were from grade seven, four from grade eight, and two from grade nine. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, and lasted between 15 and 40 minutes, depending upon the depth of students' answers. A list of questions was used to guide discussion (see Appendix H). However, the precise questions and order also depended upon students' responses. All students selected for interviews had received permission to be audiotaped as per consent forms. However, at the beginning of each interview, I confirmed that the student remained willing to have the conversation taped. One of the nine students declined to be audiotaped. As a result, this student's data was collected manually.

## Building an Authentic Database

Walker (1999) discusses authenticity in terms of data that is representative of the way participants' perceive and interpret events. In other words, an authentic database is one that reflects the truth as the participants' see it. Authenticity is more likely to be obtained if data are collected within the appropriate context (ie. the school) and on the participants' terms (Walker, 1999). Employing various data collection methods and exploring different perspectives can also enhance authenticity (Kvale, 1996). In this study, a combination of interviews, surveys, and meetings were used to obtain a robust database. This allowed data to be viewed through varying lenses. Authenticity was then established by revisiting these different perspectives throughout the data analysis process.

## Chapter 4

## TEACHER DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter describes the junior high teachers' perceptions regarding the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project implementation. I will analyze data from teacher surveys, teacher meetings, and the needs assessment activity conducted at the beginning of the study. The initial views are examined, and are compared to teachers' final impressions after one school year of action research and Project implementation. As well, the proposed goals set by the teachers are viewed in contrast to what was actually accomplished.

Since this study intended to observe the SACS Project implementation at the junior high level in one school, only the junior high teachers were included in the data collection process. While this meant that the sample size for teacher data was only seven teachers, small samples are typical in qualitative studies (Gall et al., 1996). "In purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be 'information-rich' with respect to the purposes of the study" (p. 218). The seven junior high teachers provided this rich data source for examining SACS Project implementation.

### Teacher Surveys

Surveys are used extensively in educational research to collect data that is not directly observable (Gall et al., 1996). For this study, I devised a short anonymous survey (see Appendix C) in order to obtain feeling and attitudes that may not have been expressed candidly in a teacher meeting or group interview. Teachers were asked their initial perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project and of the prospect of working with the other junior high teachers in their school. The survey responses were on a four point Likert scale; teachers could select the responses *very much, somewhat, a little,* or *not at all* for each personal statement.

As my intention was to determine initial reactions to implementing the Safe and Caring Schools Project, I administered this survey at the beginning of the first teacher meeting (Oct. 18th, 2002). Although this was prior to a detailed discussion of the research timeline and the proposed action for the year, four of the seven teachers had already received a general description of the SACS Project several months earlier, while attending a two day workshop on bullying at the Safe and Caring Schools office. This initial introduction to the Project, emerging from the vice-principal's awareness of and interest in the SACS initiative, allowed these teachers to gain a better understanding of what the Project, and my action research, would entail. After learning about the general objectives of the research, this group discussed the possibility of a collaborative approach to Project implementation among the junior high staff. The four teachers in this preliminary meeting seemed to agree that integrating SACS values into the curriculum would be beneficial for their school, and that a collective method would most effectively maintain progress. It was the enthusiasm expressed by this group which prompted me to ask this school to participate in the action research process. The three teachers who were absent from the workshop did receive some prior information about Safe and Caring Schools through meetings with their administration, and were aware of the upcoming research.

While all seven of the junior high teachers involved in the action research filled out the teacher survey, one teacher chose to leave some responses unanswered. Therefore, some results are out of seven possible responses and others are out of six.

For the first set of questions, which inquired about present feelings and perceptions regarding the implementation of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project in the school, the results showed moderate enthusiasm mixed with much hesitation. Given that the uncertainty of most, if not all, new initiatives can cause reluctance and overshadow potential eagerness, this reaction was expected. The second set of questions asked teachers to indicate their feelings with regard to working as a team. My hope was that these responses would reflect the current dynamics of the group, highlighting strengths as well as any possible tensions. The survey revealed that the teachers did have

some history of working collaboratively. Five out of six teachers responded that they were already working together to some degree, indicating that individual responses were likely based on current or past experiences of working together.

Excitement and confidence among the teachers varied much more widely about working together than it did about general project implementation. For example, *confidence in accomplishing work as a team* varied uniformly between *a little, somewhat,* and *very much* (two responses each), and *confidence in working successfully as a team* varied across all possible responses. Of course, these results may indicate personal preferences as much as they may be predicting the occurrence of constructive or strained collaboration as a result of current group dynamics. Individual preferences and tensions between certain teachers may explain why, in such a small group, one teacher can have complete confidence in the group's ability to work successfully as a team, while another holds absolutely no faith in the same. While we can speculate that this is perhaps due to one teacher's excessive pessimism, or the other's optimism, it is evident that perceptions of the group's bond and how they work together varied widely.

In contrast, all teachers were *somewhat* confident that the SACS Project would have a positive effect on the students' behaviours and attitudes, and most were *somewhat* confident of its effect on the entire school atmosphere. Generally, there was most confidence in the Project's effect on the teachers. This unanimous belief the teachers exhibited in the students' capacity to change and the Project's ability to affect this change was expected to be beneficial to the actual outcome.

Excessive workload has long been a problem within the field of education, and teachers' apprehensions in this study supported this concern. Not surprisingly, the perception of more work with little time to complete it was cause for anxiety. Every teacher was at least *a little* worried about the extra workload, and most stated that they were *very much* concerned. Even more compelling, all teachers felt at least *somewhat* worried about the time it would take to collaborate, and again, most said they were *very much* worried. Thus, for these teachers, the prospect of collaboration held slightly more

workload anxiety than did the basic implementation, possibly because some of the teachers may have felt they would have more control over the time when doing work on their own. Nevertheless, putting the SACS Project into practice individually seemed to bear the same high stress as did working as a team for most of the teachers.

In terms of Project implementation, the perceived relevance of a teacher's subject to an initiative's general philosophy can affect the degree to which a teacher attempts to integrate the program within personal practice. For example, teachers who see the relevance of using cooperative learning strategies to teach math lessons and use student interaction as a way to encourage respect and teamwork will likely appreciate the value of incorporating a violence prevention program across all subjects. On the other hand, teachers who feel such programs are best suited to a certain subject and do not see the significance of an integrated approach will be less likely to find opportunities to implement it themselves. In the teacher survey, relevance of the SACS Project to a teacher's subject was met with the entire range of responses. However, three out of the seven teachers responded that they believed it applied to their subjects *very much*.

As with relevance of SACS to teachers' particular subjects, confidence that their subject would be included in discussions varied widely, from *not at all* to *very much* (three out of six selected *a little* or *not at all*), and confidence that their concerns and suggestions would be addressed and valued ranged from *a little* to *very much* (five out of seven chose *very much* or *somewhat*). This again reflects the difference in perceptions of the group dynamic, as some teachers anticipated that their input and issues would go unnoticed. However, while most teachers expressed at least some concern about the success of working together and the extra time it would take, no one stated they would rather work alone. In fact, three teachers still felt *very much* excited about the possibilities of working as a team, and five were *very much* eager to begin collaborating, compared to just one that was *very much* excited about the project in general, and none that were *very much* "up for the challenge".

Of course, as most teachers and administrators are already committed to providing a safe, caring, and stimulating class environment, no school initiating a violence prevention or character education program will likely be starting from scratch. It is important to acknowledge the fact that all teachers already incorporated many safe and caring principles into their daily teaching practice. In this school, most recognized that they were already teaching safe and caring values *somewhat* or *very much*, suggesting that implementation of the Project could be met with teacher understanding, approval, and eagerness. On the other hand, teachers who are already dedicated to reinforcing social values might feel scepticism or ambiguity, believing that such a program is not needed.

## Needs Assessment

Halsall (1998) warns against using top-down measures to determine objectives of school improvement initiatives, emphasizing the need for involving teachers in determining how reforms will be put into practice. Engaging teachers in needs assessments is one way to ensure that the goals develop from the same group that will be instituting the changes. Needs assessments are also useful in identifying discrepancies between existing conditions and desired conditions. In this way, they provide "a basis for setting objectives for curriculum or program development" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 698).

A needs assessment activity was conducted during the first teacher meeting of this study. It aided in the identification of activities and practices already being used to promote a safe and caring atmosphere, as well as how staff could further improve the school environment. By breaking up the general SACS objectives into smaller, school-specific goals, the needs assessment had the potential of making the initial Project implementation clearer and more manageable, and thus less overwhelming. Examples of objectives the teachers specified were presenting a school play to increase awareness of SACS values and organizing a school rally to celebrate student progress and increase school pride. As a result of extensive research and province wide consultations, SACS has compiled a list of attributes that researchers, educators, and academics consider to be common to all safe and caring schools. These attributes are meant to "provide direction

for the development, implementation and evaluation of school principles, policies, programs, and practices" (ATA, 1997). Thus, it seemed logical that the needs assessment activity utilize these attributes as a basis by which to determine how to continue creating a safe, caring, and inclusive school environment. These same attributes also serve as a basis for the questions that comprise the student assessment tool, used in the collecting student data.

Organized into six general areas, the attributes of a safe and caring school reflect the various elements of school life. The first element is *the general nature of the school.* These attributes demonstrate how much of a climate of concern, interest and support exists, and whether teaching and learning is valued and celebrated. The second general area looks at *the behaviour between people in the school*, exploring whether respectful, responsible, and caring behaviour is modeled, how self-esteem is developed, and whether school staff and students are given opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them. *School citizenship* is the third element. The attributes here relate to how respect for human rights, individuality, and difference is promoted and whether students' individual talents and abilities are valued, and respectful, responsible citizenship is upheld. The fourth general area is *Activities and Programs.* Attributes in this category are concerned with whether school activities and programs are inclusive, have clear objectives, promote school spirit and belonging, and encourage participation from both the home and the community. Fifth are *Guidelines and Expectations*, which should be fair, meaningful, and consistent, and should encourage students to demonstrate appropriate social skills and maintain dignity and self-worth. The last element is the school's *Resources*, which should be current, and should meet objectives that benefit all students.

Each of these six attribute areas was listed on a separate sheet of flip-chart paper on tables around the room, and teachers were given the opportunity to consider and contribute to each area, writing down examples under two columns: *what we are already doing* and *what we need to do.* The teachers used the resulting list as a guide to identify which activities, teaching practices, and school customs are fostering the internalization

of prosocial values, and to suggest new methods by which to improve the current school atmosphere.

The teachers listed several points for each section. The needs of the school seemed to have been emphasized somewhat over what had been accomplished. Instead of finding distinct issues within the six separate areas, certain themes kept appearing, affecting most, if not all elements of school life. The topics that seemed to resonate the loudest across all aspects of schooling were the need for:

- collaboration between staff,
- support from the administration,
- parental involvement,
- more specific instruction relating to values and social skills,
- stricter disciplinary guidelines, and
- addressing actual behavioural problems occurring in the school.

The need for collaboration between staff was expressed as a necessity by many of the teachers. Accordingly, research on the effectiveness of school improvement deems collaborative approaches to be best suited to programs rooted in respect, responsibility, and cooperation, such as the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, and finds whole school endeavours much more likely to succeed in achieving desired objectives (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; Frost, Durrant, Head, & Holden, 2000; Green, 1998; Halsall, 1998). A concerted, whole school approach to any proposed improvement will increase the likelihood that the goals become a priority because there is a greater chance of meetings, reflection, and general concern with the new vision (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001). Additionally, involving all school staff can also address barriers to teacher participation early on by providing the support, time, and structure necessary for successful program implementation. Obstacles such as perceptions of incompetence among teachers, lack of incentive to implement change, and neglecting the objectives due to other responsibilities and school innovations can be more easily overcome through the structure and support that collaboration provides (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001).

Contrary to the teachers' call for cooperation, the survey had revealed that most teachers felt they were already working together to some extent. Only one person had stated that the junior high teaching staff were not working together at all. Perhaps the desire for collaboration among staff speaks more to the quality of interaction than it does to the existence or frequency of such. Possibly, previous school activities resulted in failed attempts at teacher collaboration. Another possibility is that some teachers are considered by the group to be more cooperative than others, so the appeal to act as a team may have been directed at specific teachers as opposed to the entire group. Unfortunately, the survey did not offer a clear indication of the perceived worth of current teacher interaction, or of the number of teachers actually involved. However, the confidence levels in the teamwork provide some insight into current perceptions. Most of the teachers were convinced that their concerns and suggestions would be addressed and valued by the other staff members. Only two lacked a strong faith in the group process. While it is difficult to predict how this discrepancy between views will play out, having so many possible explanations, I still feel it was important to get a sense of the teachers' feelings regarding working together. Predominantly negative responses warn the researcher and staff of potential challenges, while positive sentiment can function to maintain confidence and motivation to keep the Project in progress.

Many teachers also deemed support from the administration a necessity. Again this need is corroborated by much of the evaluative research on violence prevention programs. In fact, in his examination of several case studies, Halsall (1998) found that in the most successful outcomes, administrators functioned not just to support the particular program, but to initiate and sustain both the proposed process and the accompanying research. While a wide group of staff was always involved, an active school administration provided the support, motivation, and awareness necessary to maintain project momentum.

Similarly, previous research findings echo the importance of parental involvement (Coloroso, 2003; Halsall, 1998). Teachers emphasized the need of parental involvement to be real and responsible, referring to some parents who would offer their assistance, and

then not follow through with their promises, and others who were quick to offer advice when a problem arose that directly involved their child, but did nothing to support the teachers on an ongoing basis.

When the teachers identified the need to provide more specific instruction in regards to values and social skills, they spoke of the potential benefits that could emerge from teaching what respect and responsibility is outright, in conjunction with modelling and encouraging corresponding behaviour. Discussing the terms intentionally with students, and clarifying certain vague phrases such as respect, responsibility, cooperation, and bullying, could better ensure that students understand not only which behaviours are appropriate, and which are disrespectful, but also that they can recognize what these behaviours look like.

The notion of specific values instruction goes hand in hand with a clear and consistent behaviour policy that outlines the consequences for inappropriate actions. Interestingly, some of the teachers called for stricter disciplinary guidelines. This may have emerged out of the frustration that stems from an ineffective policy, or one that is inefficiently implemented. Upon analysis, one issue that arose is the fact that the same policy was being used for both elementary and junior high levels. Most of the teachers believed that a separate policy for the junior high level would better address the different behavioural concerns. However, it is not enough to draft a new policy and expect it to solve all problems. Before guidelines are revised to be made stricter and more unforgiving, the policy should be examined to determine when, why, and how it is actually being applied to student behaviour, and what message is being sent to the student. The point here is not to highlight who is punishing whom or which teacher is the biggest pushover, but rather to establish whether each teacher understands the guidelines in the same way and whether they apply them uniformly and consistently. Measures must be taken to ensure not only that all teachers understand the policy, but that they have the means by which to apply the consequences consistently and confidently. In addition to teacher comprehension, the school administration must support the students in a clear understanding of the behavioural policy.

The last need identified by staff was the necessity to begin focussing on, and solving, actual behavioural problems in the school. Teachers made reference to bullying in the school that staff may witness or overhear but choose to ignore, and other inappropriate behaviours that seemed to be reoccurring. This speaks to each teacher's power to influence and resolve the problems in their school. From his extensive research on bullying, Olweus (1993) concluded that in order for a bullying prevention program to be effective, not only must teachers be aware of the bullying at their school, they must also be involved in its eradication. Since the staff is aware of at least some of the bullying occurring at the school, the next logical step is to empower them to eliminate it. Of course, in this study, the initial move to prevent bullying and other behavioural problems came with the decision to implement the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project guided by an action research approach. Consequently, applying the Project's principles to their teaching practice became the next stage. Unfortunately, this is often more complicated than simply modeling respect or teaching responsibility, and it takes more effort than obliging the staff to follow a program's requirements. "The process of translating … research into practice … depends upon a recognition of teachers themselves as the potential key contributors to any moves towards school improvement" (Carter & Halsall, 1998, p. 75). Teachers must be supported beyond agreeing to the proposed change and providing input to the goals. They must also be enabled to become actual contributors to it. Carter and Halsall explain that empowerment can be inspired by encouraging teachers to focus their attention in areas they find important "rather than forcing an effectiveness agenda through externally imposed criteria" (p. 81). In adhering to the use of action research and methods compatible to its principle of teacher involvement, this potential problem was addressed by ensuring that the teachers led the process and determined the focus. At the outset, the teacher survey and the needs assessment directed the action plan. Throughout the process, the teachers shaped the evolution of the Project implementation through input during teacher meetings, and through their ability to apply the safe and caring values to their teaching practice as they felt was appropriate. In order to maintain and nourish teacher empowerment, the project must provide staff with the tools and the confidence to begin implementing a change, namely, it must equip individuals to address bullying behaviours. As mentioned previously, four of the seven junior high teachers

attended a workshop on bullying where some strategies were discussed. Due to busy schedules and other responsibilities, additional professional development opportunities with the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project did not arise. However, the SACS program manager attended all teacher meetings with me during the school year. During these times, she was able to provide some ideas and relevant information to the staff. While additional support was available through online lesson plans and other teacher resources, the junior high teachers did not take advantage of these.

While not as many points were listed for what the teachers were already doing to make their school a safe and caring place, the activities and practices were more specific and varied across the six areas. The accomplishments described precise actions, as opposed to the more general, all encompassing notions that portrayed the needs. Presumably, it is easier to view what one is doing correctly in concrete and precise terms. Conversely, it is easier to identify what one is not doing in more general, ambiguous terms, especially since many of these ideas may have not been discussed as a staff. Included in the list of what the school staff was already doing to make their school a safe and caring place was:

- being friendly and approachable to all students;
- ensuring constant communication between home and school;
- organizing extracurricular activities such as peer support and students' union, which foster community involvement;
- disciplining students using reflection;
- using interclass teaching and cooperative learning strategies; and
- having the code of conduct signed by all parents and students.

This exercise was effective in identifying school-specific needs and narrowing the focus. During the course of the needs assessment and ensuing dialogue, the teachers proposed several interesting ways that the group could address the main issues. The importance of teaching social skills specifically and clarifying terms to students was raised. Teachers also discussed the prospect of student-led conferences, an awards night

honouring student improvement as well as achievement, and other methods by which to celebrate student learning more visibly.

Aside from determining what actions could be taken, the needs assessment allowed the teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice in relation to the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project. They could see, possibly for the first time, how the Project fit into their school, and perhaps more appropriately, that it did in fact fit in. The clearer understanding of the Project that was provided by collecting information related to the attributes demonstrates that, rather than a rigid program invested in a particular curriculum, SACS is a simple set of related and intertwined prosocial values. As such, the Project effectively lends itself to any strategy for school improvement that is rooted in a commitment to respectful and responsible citizenship.

**Teacher Meetings**

At the outset, teacher meetings were proposed to occur monthly to ensure the SACS Project was discussed regularly. Given that the fundamental elements of action research are continuous awareness, reflection, and cyclical modification of teacher practice and class activities, frequent dialogue among all those involved in the study is necessary for action research to progress. I also used these meetings to obtain teacher perceptions of the SACS Project and to learn what processes were being used to integrate social values into the curriculum.

My meetings with the teachers were usually preceded by a discussion with the lead teacher, who was responsible for liasing between me and the other junior high staff. This interaction allowed each meeting with staff to be focussed and brief. The lead teacher also assumed the role of facilitating the implementation process by keeping school staff up to date on the action research schedule.

The first teacher meeting had several objectives. Aside from providing information about the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project and the action research,

the main purpose was to increase the comfort level of the teachers involved, and to address any anxiety and concerns. Since most of the teachers had already received background information on the Project in the spring, the meeting focussed on the action research. The general timeline of the research, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all involved, was discussed. The teacher surveys were conducted and all teachers participated in the needs assessment activity. As well, preparations for conducting the student pre-test surveys were initiated. Parental consent forms were left for the teachers to hand out to all junior high students, and tentative dates were discussed. It was decided that I would conduct all of the student surveys during class time in a few groups, to be decided once all the parental consent forms were returned.

While a few of the teachers expressed interest in the Project during this first meeting, apprehension seemed to be the overriding sentiment. All conveyed concern with the extra time and meetings involved. As mentioned in the teacher survey analysis, this was expected, and is typical for new program implementation (Carter & Halsall, 1998). In discussing how the results of the student surveys would be used, some of the teachers did not see the benefit of involving students in assessing the needs or analyzing the survey results. A few speculated that working through the data with junior high students would be inviting juvenile behaviour as the class might not take the information seriously. While such reactions seemed to be counter to the SACS philosophy, I took it to be more indicative of concerns over the time than of an insensitivity to SACS values.

The next teacher meeting did not take place until three months later, in January. This delay was due to the extended period of time it took to receive parental consent forms back from as many students as possible. Coordinating a time to conduct the student surveys (completed in October) and a time to meet around the Christmas holidays further complicated the process. With the exception of one teacher, all were present.

This meeting's objective was primarily to assess to what degree the Project had been underway and whether the action research process was directing implementation through discussions, reflection, and modification of activities. Since our initial meeting in

October, staff had had one formal discussion regarding the Project's progress. While this was not as frequent as the monthly meetings I had originally hoped for, it nevertheless indicated some consciousness of the Project and the need for it to advance. It also revealed some of the challenges of time, coordination, and motivation the lead teacher had to contend with in maintaining the Project's momentum within the school.

In assessing progress, I also wanted to observe whether the recent awareness of the significance of teaching respect and responsibility had begun affecting teaching practice. While it appeared that classroom activities were being used sporadically to formally teach SACS values, all teachers did seem to be more aware of their own practice and their influence on students. One teacher mentioned using stories about respect, responsibility, and empathy in French, and another applied the philosophy in gym and success management. All agreed that they were more consciously using specific *values* vocabulary to clarify the difference between respectful and disrespectful behaviour. Words like *respect*, *dignity*, *honesty, loyalty*, *responsibility*, and *empathy* were being used deliberately to distinguish socially appropriate actions from socially damaging ones, allowing students to better understand an action's meanings and manifestations. Since all agreed on the potential benefits, the staff decided to continue this practice in hopes that comprehension of values would eventually lead to internalization within students.

The second main goal of the meeting was to present the results of the student surveys to the teachers, from which a more specific plan of action developed. Discussing the survey results seemed to have a motivating effect on the teachers. Most appeared full of ideas and eager to try them. Teachers agreed to engage in a more concerted effort to teach values specifically. They decided that each month would be devoted to a different value, starting with respect. There was some discussion of teachers coming together to plan inter-class and inter-grade activities, as well as a whole school celebration incorporating a Safe and Caring Schools theme. Contrary to some initial feelings, the teachers at this point decided that it would be beneficial to present the results of the surveys to the class. In order to prevent students from seeing precise percentages and possibly determining which responses were given by whom, I offered to provide a

handout of generalized statements summarizing student replies. Teachers then presented these data to their classes as discussion starters.

The next meeting with teachers occurred the following month, in February, and was meant as a follow up to the initial action plan from the previous meeting. Again, all but one teacher attended. During this meeting I learned that student survey results were discussed in class, and that teachers used the data to further adjust their teaching practice. I was struck with the first indication of SACS Project implementation upon entering the classroom where the meeting was to take place. Several key statements were listed on the front board:

- Stick up for someone being teased,
- Offer to help,
- Take care of the environment,
- Pay attention to others,
- Think about others.

These and other suggestions comprised a list of ways to show respect that the class had brainstormed.

Since all classes had discussed the results and addressed relevant issues, teachers took turns sharing their recent attempts at teaching social skills and generally encouraging the Safe and Caring Schools philosophy. One teacher took advantage of the social studies unit on Japan to discuss the significance of respect in Japanese culture. In one assignment, students were to write a letter as if they were Japanese students, trying to keep in mind how the Japanese value respect. This lesson allowed the teacher to detect confusion among the class between respect and politeness or obedience, prompting a follow-up discussion. This presented additional opportunities for students to develop their understanding and share their thoughts on these ideals with others.

Another teacher used the occasion to discuss examples of respect in students' lives, allowing the class to direct the conversation. Students commented on the increasing

pressure and responsibilities placed on children in contemporary society. The expectation to mature at a faster rate appeared to be a large burden on many of the students. Michael Apple (1996) supports the use of personal stories as a means of reawakening our moral awareness. He argues that "any approach that evacuates the aesthetic, the personal, and the ethical from our activities as educators is not about education at all. It is about training" (p. xiii).

Motivated by the student survey results, one class took turns sharing which jokes they found disrespectful. The teacher noted that many students expressed surprise, not having realized that their comments may have been hurtful to others. This showed the class how individual the concept of respect really is, and how it is this individuality that necessitates mutual respect. Following similar discussions, another class brainstormed what constitutes bullying and what is respect, and came up with a plan of action. Students resolved to "keep their eyes open" to prevent bullying in their school. Once a week, the students would be given the opportunity to recount situations in which they used or experienced respectful behaviour. This continual review of how Project implementation was working in individual classrooms served to keep the focus on values up front.

One teacher discussed how he began more consciously incorporating respect and dignity into student discipline. In a situation in which one student hit another with a rubber band, the teacher attempted to generate some empathy in the perpetrator by asking the victim how it felt. Patience and a little prodding revealed that the targeted student felt hurt and embarrassed, emotions that had surprised the perpetrator, who had not realized that his actions could have hurt another student unintentionally. This dialogue led to a prompt apology, and possibly a heightened awareness of how one's conduct can inadvertently affect others.

This teacher also noted that he had been more prone to suspending students in the past, but had soon realized that suspensions seemed to deter behavioural problems for no more than a month. At this point students would forget, or simply get used to, the idea of getting suspended, and not care anymore. He acknowledged better results with simple

discussions that allowed students to consider how others perceive their actions. As well, this teacher noted his attempt to discuss student actions as choices, placing the responsibility on the student for his/ her actions. Both students involved in a conflict would be encouraged to discuss it and work out the aggressor's punishment with this teacher's guidance. As a result, disciplinary action became logical rather than punitive.

**Final Impressions**

The last meeting occurred in June, after the end of the school year. This gave me the opportunity to establish final impressions of the first year of SACS implementation among the junior high teachers. Unfortunately, due to the long interval since the previous meeting, it was difficult to gauge how much the Project had actually progressed. While teachers felt that their practice had remained influenced by the SACS values, for the sake of time, specific examples of additional class activities or lessons were not shared.

Nevertheless, all the teachers were positive about the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project. They agreed that this initiative was useful in keeping staff aware of the values that underlie both class lessons and their own behaviour. Functioning more as an instrument for change than as a precise directive, the SACS Project encouraged the teachers to become more focused and united in their goals of creating a safe, caring, and inclusive environment for all students. The lead teacher in particular saw this program as being very beneficial to the school as a means of focussing on the school's core values and bringing respect and responsibility to the forefront of education.

One teacher mentioned that simply using the values terminology increased student understanding of what behaviours are unacceptable, and provided bullies and victims with the same language with which to address issues and solve the problem. SACS values were used during daily class routines to identify positive and negative behaviours, allowing teachers to highlight which value was being upheld or broken. The same ideals were also used in discipline to identify the main issue, creating clearer expectations, consistency, and placing responsibility on students for their behaviour.

While they appreciated the SACS philosophy, and how closely it paralleled the values on which their own school is based, the teachers were not concerned with SACS lesson plans or access to resources. They felt that the values were sufficiently addressed and integrated by discussing them when the occasion arose. Otherwise, they used their own ideas for class activities teaching social skills and values. Simply acknowledging the values, teachers felt, worked well to create a space for heightened sensitivity. For example, teachers believed they had become much more adept at noticing instances of respect and disrespect in their classes, and were more likely to take advantage of these teachable moments to promote social skills. One teacher noted that "*because of the project, (teachers) have discussed bullying more often with (their) students*". In this regard, the Project triggered a change in adult behaviour. Staff became more likely to stop bullying and disrespectful behaviours while they were happening instead of relying on random lessons or various values unrelated to what actually happened in class. Thus, project implementation helped to increase the significance of teachable moments by prompting teachers to use student experiences to teach social skills.

Research suggests that the elusiveness of student behaviour and the complex relationship between teachers and students make school improvement a difficult, and somewhat daunting task. Many academics and researchers indicate that a significant change in school atmosphere will take at least seven years of commitment to an effective program. Based on the feedback from the teachers, change is indeed a slow process. Some teachers stated that they found no major change in student behaviour. Evaluation of the Second Step violence prevention program in a Western Canadian city found similar results (Madak & Bravi, 1992). Most of the staff indicated that the program had little affect on student behaviour, yet they recommended that it be continued and expanded to other schools. Many qualified their recommendations by stating that more time was needed for program implementation and evaluation (Madak & Bravi, 1992).

However, despite these perceptions, the teachers all agreed that the Project should continue. School staff seemed to maintain their optimism regarding the effects of SACS. In planning strategies for the upcoming year, teachers acknowledged the necessity of

community involvement, which had been absent this year. Recognizing that great effort is needed to achieve this sometimes overwhelming goal, the teachers agreed that attempts should begin early on in the upcoming school year. Hypothesizing that an interactive setting is more likely to effect a lasting change among students, staff also discussed the possibility of conducting workshops related to respect and dealing with bullies with small groups of students. Generally, teachers expressed a desire to continue addressing the SACS values in school immediately in order to regain the Project's momentum.

## Discussion

While most of the teachers expressed optimism in the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, and all had confidence in its ability to effect some degree of positive change, commitment seemed to be sporadic. Dedication to the notion of encouraging and reinforcing respect, responsibility, and non-violent conflict resolution was apparent in each teacher. However, several factors that are seemingly inherent in the current state of education likely affected the school's ability to make Project implementation more of a priority. These are discussed below.

The needs assessment activity at the beginning of the study helped to establish several issues that were specific to the school. As previously described, the staff emphasized many needs that are considered to be crucial to successful violence prevention program implementation. Unfortunately, these vital attributes were not properly addressed. While they were presented and discussed during the initial meeting, teachers did not assume specific responsibilities related to SACS, and thus approaches to deliberately resolve these issues were not attempted.

Collaboration among staff was one such characteristic that came up often during the needs assessment. Halsall (1998) lists several characteristics of a successful collaborative school culture. In order to effectively achieve school improvement through shared efforts, he suggests that teachers must:

- work together cooperatively rather than competitively,

- see the value of collaborating,
- want to contribute, and
- be committed to the vision, goals, and values of the proposed change.

Also imperative is the notion of shared leadership, shared involvement, and shared responsibilities among all staff (Halsall, 1998).

Despite their seeming simplicity, these are often complex goals. While the teacher surveys revealed that most believed they were already working together on some activities, and meetings confirmed that teachers were indeed committed to the Safe and Caring values, the plan to collaborate did not take precedence over school routine. It became clear from the survey that some teachers lacked confidence in the group process and doubted their input would be valued. Thus it is possible that not every teacher saw the value of collaborating, and some probably did not care to contribute to the group, preferring instead to work on their own. Since some of the teachers were absent when the decision was made to proceed with Project implementation as a team, they may have felt the group plan, and perhaps the entire Project, was imposed upon them. The stress that comes from this type of obligatory partnership is likely to negatively affect any potential teacher collaboration (Halsall, 1998). In fact, a forced cooperative approach may spur resistance not only to the notion of working together, but to the program itself (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001).

From my participation in the teacher meetings, it seemed clear that the collaborative aspect of the SACS Project, which the junior high teachers had proposed at the beginning of the research, did not occur. The obvious and probably most familiar explanation is that of time and workload. Indeed, the teacher survey found that the time it would take to collaborate was in fact a big concern among the teachers. After preparation, class time, marking, evaluation, participating in extra-curricular activities, and several other responsibilities, it is difficult for teachers to conceive of fitting in more planning and teacher meetings into their already busy schedules. This lack of time, coupled with a lack of incentive adds to the complexity of implementing a program of such magnitude in

a school. However, the same survey revealed that most were still eager to begin collaborating, with a majority of the group believing that their group would work together successfully. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the *anxiety* over workload and time may have prevented the teachers from attempting any shared activities, or whether teacher workload *itself* actually made any teamwork related to SACS prohibitive. Alternatively, "not getting around to it" due to lack of motivation or other priorities may have also played a role.

Upon considerable contemplation, however, I think the lack of shared leadership and shared responsibilities played the largest factor in the absence of coordinated school activities. The lead teacher provided effective leadership and ensured that the process continued, which further inspired his enthusiasm, but did not seem to greatly influence interest from the rest of the staff. Involving each teacher more intimately by inviting them to undertake specific tasks and responsibilities might have helped to ensure a more united effort by promoting the belief that everyone is responsible in creating a change and that each has something to offer (Halsall, 1998). Such a strategy might have identified any strong teacher resistance early on. As well, it would have allowed me to address any apparent tensions at the start of the research instead of speculating about what the problems might be after the fact.

Of course, the collaborative cultures Halsall (1998) describes do not emerge from thin air. Deliberate structures must be created, usually by school administration, in order to establish the supportive framework that permits staff to work together easily while carrying out the action plan. This type of administrative support was also identified as a need by the school staff. While the administrators actually initiated SACS Project implementation, and certainly provided their encouragement, a stronger involvement in the day to day activities may have helped to maintain momentum.

Support that enabled teacher empowerment may also have been weak. Teachers need to feel capable in a program before they can be confident in adopting it within their practice. To do this they must be given the opportunity to examine their own beliefs and

how these fit in to the new vision. "Formal and informal staff development in the school encourages a spirit of inquiry to facilitate the examination of both practice and beliefs" (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001, p. 155). While understanding the importance of creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, responsibility, and kindness, most teachers admitted that they still needed to learn more about the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project. An overview of the Project had been provided, and four of the teachers had also attended a workshop offered by SACS, however, this request to learn more should have been followed up. Additional workshops were available and SACS staff was willing to present additional information at the school. However, I left it up to the school staff to initiate this process, so time and other priorities likely interfered. In terms of informal staff development, more frequent gatherings devoted to discussing SACS may have enhanced feelings of empowerment and increased staff confidence in the Project.

With the complexity of implementing a whole school violence prevention program, it is no wonder that change in school culture is thought to take at least seven years. Early on in the research I came to see that one school year was too brief a period to implement such a comprehensive violence prevention program, measure its effectiveness, and expect to discover a detectable improvement. Fortunately, the staff at the school recognized this and did not let impatience and desires for a quick fix to obscure their judgement.

Because all the elements necessary for successful Project implementation were not in place, following through with the proposed actions likely posed a challenge for the teachers. As a result, many of the ideas for activities promoting an atmosphere of respect had not been attempted over the course of the action research. In the end, it was the activities that teachers could implement on their own, within their classes and in their individual teaching practice, that were employed. While the teachers were indeed passionate about encouraging respect and reducing bullying, and were eager to continue changing the school atmosphere, modelling and discussing prosocial values within individual classrooms was the preferred method of espousing SACS philosophy.

## Chapter 5

## STUDENT DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the data collected from student surveys and interviews. These results are explored in relation to other Canadian and international studies on violence prevention programs and bullying in schools.

Interviews are a recommended method for providing "the basic data for the development of an understanding of the relations between social actors and their situation" (Gaskell, 2000, p. 39). The opportunity for clarification and follow-up on any unclear or interesting responses made interviewing a useful means for obtaining a deeper understanding of student perceptions and experiences within the school context.

Surveys were also useful for collecting information on activities and behaviours that occurred in the past and could not be observed. However, unlike personal interviews, surveys are often valuable for eliciting sensitive information. School violence fits this category. Since surveys were anonymous, students were more likely to self-identify as bullies or victims, and were more likely to truthfully report on bullying without fear of reprisal.

The data in this chapter have been categorized and discussed by theme rather than by methodology. Thus, student perceptions from both survey and interview results are examined together, in the following sections: (1) Bullying Incidents, (2) Awareness of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, (3) Student Behaviour, (4) Adult behaviour, (5) Conflict Resolution Skills, and (6) Behaviour Policy.

Student surveys were conducted twice, once prior to Project implementation in order to obtain baseline data, and then again at the end of the school year. Since a significant change was not established between the pre- and post-test data for any of the

survey questions, all the survey responses in the following sections refer to the initial survey conducted in October. The possible reasons for a lack of variation in survey results are then discussed in the last section of this chapter: Student Surveys: Comparing Pre-tests to Post-tests.

## Bullying Incidents

While violence in this school is not as common as other Canadian studies would imply, it nevertheless identifies bullying as a concern for some of its students. In the survey, 11% said they were bullied *quite often* or *most of the time*, suggesting that approximately one in ten students at this junior high school regularly experience some form of intimidation and distress. This is less than the Calgary study that found over 25% of elementary students had experienced physical and verbal bullying (Beran & Tutty, 2002). However, it is comparable to the 8% in Ontario who reported being bullied at least once a week (Charach, et al., 1995) and 9% who reported being victims of bullying at least sometimes, in a large-scale Norwegian study (Olweus, 1993).

In these anonymous results, students reported that approximately 4% of the students are doing most of the bullying. Another 8% stated that they bully others *once in a while*, leaving 88% who *seldom* or *never* bully. Compared to the 26-33% of elementary school children who were observed bullying others on a Toronto school playground (Pepler et al., 1998), only a fraction of the students at this school are the main perpetrators of violence and grief to others. The difference here may be due to the fact that this study relied on self-identification of bullying. While students were provided with a brief description of what bullying might consist of, some students may not be aware that their own actions are being perceived as such. Student reactions to certain class discussions on what students find disrespectful (discussed in chapter four) substantiate this interpretation. Meanwhile, the Pepler et al. study (1998) is one of the only Canadian studies to observe bullying directly. Because it did not rely on children's definitions of bullying, it may be one of the most accurate accounts of actual bullying in a Canadian school.

The number of students who did not feel safe at this school seems to be directly related to the amount of victims of bullying. About 12% stated that they seldom or never feel safe at school, approximately the same number as those who said they experience bullying. This is considerably lower than the 29% of students from an Ontario school who claimed they felt safe at school *sometimes* or *not at all* (Ryan et al., 1993). Nevertheless, in a junior high school of approximately 120 students, this means that ten students may be experiencing bullying on an ongoing basis.

Of the nine students interviewed, two said that they had been bullied at school in the past. This rate is similar to the estimated 18-22% of elementary children Pepler et al. (1998) labelled as victims of bullying on Toronto school playgrounds. However, it is important to note that both of these students clarified that they no longer felt victimized. In one case, the bully stopped the behaviour on his/ her own, and the other was deterred by the threat of expulsion, after an initial suspension. Both of these events had occurred prior to the SACS Project being introduced to the school.

While over half of the students interviewed said that they did not see or experience much bullying, each of these students qualified this perception by explaining that while physical bullying is rare, verbal bullying does occasionally occur. These data are corroborated by many other studies on bullying that have found that, typically, at least two thirds of bullying is verbal (ATA, 2003; Bidwell, 1997; Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1993).

According to the surveys, 61% of the students are bystanders to bullying episodes in their school at least occasionally. Of these, over half said they witness bullying *quite often* or *most of the time*. Correspondingly, three students in the interviews who themselves did not experience bullying said it was nevertheless a problem at their school.

While it is important to compare results across similar Canadian studies, the methods used to conduct research on bullying have varied considerably, preventing a meaningful comparative analysis. As previously mentioned, the research involving the

observation of bullying firsthand found high accounts of school violence. However, other studies relying on self-reporting also found a higher incidence of violence. For example, 45% of 850 Ontario students surveyed in grades six to nine reported that there was *some* to *a lot* of violence in their schools. Similarly, studies conducted in Alberta found that physical forms of violence had been experienced by over one third (Smith et al., 1995), and over one half (MacDonald, 1995) of the students at least occasionally. These studies may have employed more specific questions to prompt more detailed answers. Conversely, questions may have been more general, eliciting broader replies. Of course, it is also possible that the other schools have a higher incidence of violence. However since different methods of collecting data were used, it is difficult to accurately explain the reasons for varying results.

Since the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools assessment tool did not specify between physical and non-physical forms of bullying, the surveys do not present a clear indication of the extent of physical violence. However, according to the interviews, hitting, kicking, and fighting were rare, and the bullying that warranted the most concern were the more covert, indirect forms, such as name-calling, threats, gossip, and exclusion.

### Awareness of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project

Most students understood that the school began implementing the SACS Project in order to prevent bullying and improve the school climate to make it a safer and more caring place for everyone. Only two students stated that they had "*no idea*". Interestingly, all the interviewed respondents admitted that they did not know much about the Project, beyond the fact that I was coming in to conduct surveys. Each appeared to equate SACS with my research only, and did not draw the connection between class activities on respect and responsibility and the increased focus on bullying with the SACS Project. However, since awareness of the Project is secondary to experiencing and appreciating its benefits, the following data will concentrate on knowledge that the students felt they gained, without details regarding what they thought the project was.

Except for one individual, all students interviewed agreed that they learned about respect and the merits of interacting positively with others, and that these lessons had at least some benefits. Many described class discussions regarding what behaviours constitute bullying, how these affect others, and strategies for interacting with aggressive people. One student explained that in school they *"are taught to care about each other, treat others the way (they) want to be treated"*. Another recalled a conversation in class about respecting others, reflecting that *"it made a difference in class, it helped a lot. Students treated each other better (in that class) because of it"*. These comments attest to the significance of deliberately teaching prosocial values and encouraging students to consider how their actions and behaviours affect others.

Although most interviewees remembered lessons on respect and responsibility in Religion class, two students mentioned that the topics were brought up in several other classes, including French and Math. They noted that teachers would sometimes point out the responsible or thoughtful behaviours of others, or would draw class attention to situations they felt merited class awareness and allowed for a valuable lesson. This acknowledged teachers' use of the invaluable "teachable moment" to address important issues as they arise in class. Usually culminating in a memorable social lesson, teachable moments occur irrespective of the curriculum or the class's daily timetable, and require an astute educator ready to take advantage of every opportunity to highlight a valuable message. A strong advocate of the teachable moment, SACS encourages the use of daily school situations not only to teach crucial social values and to model appropriate behaviours, but to allow students to experiment with their own feelings and test out prosocial responses in the safe environment that a classroom can provide.

The teachers agreed that it was in fact SACS that prompted staff to be more sensitive to the values being espoused in class and more responsive to student interactions that would elicit greater social awareness. One student stated that teachers would *"...bring up (bullying) if there was an issue in class that they want(ed) to talk about."* This student went on to express his/ her positive opinion of the outcome of this enhanced consciousness. *"I think it does bring it to the mind of the student that we have*

*to (be respectful, etc).* Cooperative learning as a method to promote respectful interactions and improve behaviour also helped to create a more caring classroom atmosphere. One respondent discussed how the class began doing more group work "*because the teacher noticed that (the students were) not close with other people so (they were) paired up and (students) ask questions about each other... it worked... but not with everyone*". It is encouraging that this student recognized the motive behind this task and appreciated the effects it had on different students.

These situations exemplify the use of underlying collaborative practice as a teaching tool for social lessons, and how this alone can have as much effect on student learning as the lesson content. The significance of promoting social responsibility through teaching strategies that encourage student-initiated interaction, cooperative learning, and mutually supportive relationships are often stressed in education (Apple, 1996; Berman, 1997, Giroux, 1988). The use of methods and teaching practice to model and encourage effective social skills is greatly emphasized by the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools' programs and resources, as these social situations and classroom interactions provide the opportunity for students to gain confidence using appropriate social skills in a non-threatening environment.

While SACS acknowledges that many teachers are indeed experts at incorporating various cooperative teaching methods seamlessly into daily activities, the Project nevertheless encourages educators to continue to expand their awareness of the effectiveness of these and other approaches. A continuous understanding of the effects that teaching practice has on student behaviour serves as a constant reminder that the method of learning is as important as the content being taught.

**Student Behaviour**

Effects of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project on the junior high students were recounted in the interviews during my inquiry into changes in student interactions. Most students felt that everyone in their school usually treated one another with respect.

Thus, some responded that they did not notice a significant change in how people treated each other since the SACS Project began, explaining that there were no problems before.

However, a few students felt strongly about the difference the SACS Project made in their classes. One respondent explained that safe and caring values were the focus of a class discussion that prompted students to share their views. This person stated that: *"we discussed what we put for the answers (in the survey) or what we thought about our school... it helped everyone to understand more, and it helped everyone to get along better by seeing what other people put down"*. Another confirmed the positive effects of simply completing the survey. *"The way students treated students was different after the (survey), they started getting along better... before there were some people bothering others but now its stopped. It's still better (now). There could still be occasional fights, but not as bad"*. The value of completing the survey alone is apparent from these comments. Not only did some students take the questions very seriously, they were also inspired to consider the issues over an extended period of time, allowing new insights to shape future interactions.

In addition to the impact the survey had on the students, the activities that teachers implemented also began influencing student behaviour. One interviewee commented that the lessons on respect *"made a big difference in our class. Now (the students) help each other, don't call each other names"*. This student continued on to say that the improvement was still apparent at the time of interview. Another observed that following class activities emphasizing positive human interaction *"... there is that atmosphere (of respect) that stays, where we all know that we have to deal with each other positively... After a talk in class, people do keep it in mind"*.

All of these responses speak to the strength and permanence of lessons on respect for some students. Longevity of values learned in such programs has long been a matter of questionable concern, as the research on violence prevention and character education lacks longitudinal studies which track the endurance and internalization of social skills and values lessons. However, these students seem to be well on their way to internalizing

these values and maintaining the appropriate social skills to interact with others peacefully and effectively.

While some students saw a lasting change in their classroom atmosphere, others felt that improvement was fleeting. One respondent blamed hectic student life for the Project's inability to make a permanent impression in some students, interestingly alluding to a young person's "normal life" as being void of such values:

> *Maybe the next day after we wrote the (survey), we would consider (its content), but after a while, its just not a big part of our lives because we have studying and homework ... so it just kind of slips our mind, and then you just go back to normal.*

As with all lessons, certain students were affected more than others. One respondent stated that teaching respect at a junior high level may be lost on many students, believing maturity, or lack thereof, to be the main factor in student behaviour: *"we as students don't realize that its what we've done in the situation ... to generate that response from the teacher ... I think it's a question of maturity ... I don't think junior high is the place for this to change"*. This student seemed to believe that lack of respect may simply be a necessary stage in the progression of one's personal development. Ironically, through their general manner and insightful responses, most of the students interviewed conveyed an admirable understanding of respect and responsibility, and a strong awareness of the consequences of their actions.

Nevertheless, the suggestion that lessons on respect are generally lost on some students was echoed throughout the interviews. I learned that *"some students understand what they are being taught (so the lessons affect them), but some just don't and it just goes in one ear and goes out the other"*. Of course, no program can claim to influence every targeted individual, and the SACS Project is no exception. Generally, however, the interviews suggest that some discernable change in student interaction did occur following Project implementation.

The survey results were somewhat inconsistent with the interview findings, as there were no significant changes detected between the pre-tests and post-tests regarding student behaviour. The results did however bring to light the disparity between how students see themselves compared to how others perceive their actions. While an amazing 98% of the students felt that they were friendly to all other students despite differences in race, culture, religion, and so on (the remaining 2% answered *don't know*), there were several students who did not interpret this friendliness as such. Thirty-one percent said they were made fun of at school because they are different, and 55% witnessed others being made fun of, at least occasionally. This discrepancy may be highlighting the fact that many students are not fully aware of how their actions are being perceived, and how they affect others, an inattentiveness substantiated by the teacher data.

While the majority believed that they were friendly to everybody, a few students did admit to making fun of others because of their differences--9% said they did at least occasionally. In the comments section, a few students noted that teasing was usually meant as a joke. Of course, it is unclear whether the targets of the jokes were aware of their good nature. Unfortunately the survey questions do not resolve the distinction between *making fun of* as friendly teasing, and actions that are mean-spirited and could be labelled as bullying. What is apparent, however, is the ambiguity of some students' intentions.

These data validate the call for specific lessons on respectful social interactions and attest to the importance of clearly distinguishing between teasing and taunting, telling and tattling, and other easily confused actions. As well, they speak to the importance of keeping students mindful of the fact that each person perceives situations differently, and as a result, jokes and friendly teasing may be misinterpreted as malicious taunting, even if not intended as such. Consequently, students must also be given the skills necessary to fix their unintentional mistakes. This means they need to expect that they may inadvertently offend people occasionally, and that this is normal and acceptable if they recognize their responsibility to resolve the problem and mend any hurt feelings.

Critics of character education need not be concerned that children who are taught to distinguish between socially acceptable and inappropriate behaviours will grow up to be hypersensitive, wimpy, or unable to take a joke. It is not meant to discourage friendly teasing among children, nor does increasing the sensitivity of children preclude them from learning to laugh at themselves. Rather, recognizing the difference between good-natured humour and cruel insults encourages children to consider how others experience situations, developing empathy and a concern for others. In addition to learning what could be perceived as offensive, character education also teaches children how to manage abusive and aggressive people and how to maintain dignity and self-respect by dealing non-violently when faced with conflict. While the interview results illustrate that SACS did encourage teachers to focus on these social skills and that the ensuing lessons stimulated sympathy and compassion among some students, it is clear that respect and responsibility must be continuously reinforced in order to affect more individuals. Consistent reinforcement will also ensure that the development of essential social values is not undermined by negative influences.

**Adult Behaviour**

Both interviews and surveys also inquired into student perceptions of adult behaviour. Since only the initial survey results are discussed here, they do not convey the effects that SACS had over the school year. Rather, these data communicate general student opinion of the safe and caring nature of their school prior to Project implementation. The survey questions explore how junior high youth viewed adult behaviour and teaching practice, and how they felt about school. The interviews, on the other hand, more clearly illuminate the changes in adult behaviour after SACS implementation, and how teachers enhanced their practice to address bullying and other behavioural problems.

The survey results revealed that most of the students felt supported and cared for by the majority of the teachers, and saw their school as a friendly and supportive environment. Eighty-five percent of the students said adults in their school showed that

they care about them at least *once in a while*. Of these, over half responded that this occured *most of the time* or *quite often*. Adults smiled and were friendly according to 86% of students. Another 85% responded that school staff was available for discussion and support when students needed it, and 89% said they received help with their schoolwork from teachers when they asked. An impressive 92% felt that the adults listened to students when they talked to them. Halsall (1998) speaks to the importance of listening and responding to students' views. "One of the greatest barriers to change is (students') feeling that teachers do not listen to students' opinions and, indeed, are not interested in them as people" (p. 45). By this measure, successful improvement in this school is a probability, as the majority of pupils feel that adults in their school do listen to students' opinions.

Interestingly, there was a general feeling among students that they were more likely than teachers to admit when they had made a mistake, and consequently would try to fix it. Sixty-seven percent of the students felt that they usually admitted their mistakes, compared to 50% who said they thought teachers usually did. Students also thought that teachers were at least as likely to notice students' mistakes as their achievements. While 81% felt that, at least *once in a while*, adults in their school noticed when students did something well, 89% thought that adults were equally quick at noticing students' mistakes.

Student control and empowerment is another element emphasized by many academics as vital to the development of social responsibility and prosocial behaviour (Halsall, 1998). Halsall stresses the importance of making students more responsible for some aspects of school life by encouraging them to help younger students or by making it simple yet meaningful to join school organizations such as school council or peer support. Especially in endeavours to change the school environment, students must be involved so their input is heard. Besides being a necessary element in making effective, positive school improvements, students need to be included so they can be assured that they have some influence over the change and that the staff care about them. "There is a

particular need to work with students in school improvement efforts because they are major participants in the change process, not simply 'end users'" (Halsall, 1998, p. 45).

In the research conducted by SACS during the development of the assessment tool, students echoed this sentiment. A group of youth participated in a focus group intended to provide feedback for survey revision. All declared that the question "when decisions that affect students are being made at school, I can share my ideas" was essential. The survey responses in this study show that this matter may not be receiving the attention it deserves. While the majority of students did agree that they were given opportunities to share their ideas (39% said *most of the time* or *quite often* and 33% responded *once in a while*), one quarter of the students answered that they *seldom* or *never* had the chance to contribute to the decision-making process. This result may be due to differences in teacher views of the degree to which students should be involved in decision-making. While some teachers may make an effort to take student feedback into account, others may hold a more traditional view of teacher authority, not accepting student input. Alternatively, some students are more likely to feel they lack input, perhaps because the involvement they seek is on matters for which student involvement is not feasible.

Given the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project's emphasis on modelling respectful behaviour and effective conflict resolution skills, and given that all staff acknowledged an increased awareness of the values within their teaching practice and recalled becoming more perceptive of student behaviour, I expected that the students would detect some change in adult behaviour. While the survey results failed to identify any improvement, most of the students interviewed alluded to at least some change in teacher practice, actions, and reactions. This discrepancy may speak to the limitations of the survey to detect subtle differences. It may also illustrate that, despite the new focus on bullying, teachers had been employing strategies to maintain a safe and caring environment prior to SACS implementation.

More than half of the students interviewed noticed some type of positive change in adult behaviour, and even more observed an increase in attention given to bullying. Many of the statements illustrate the enthusiastic effort made by the teachers to implement the safe and caring principles in their classrooms. *"Yes, there has been more (of a focus on bullying) ... in the hallway we have the posters about loyalty, respect, honest. That was a focus in a bunch of classes ..."*. Several others commented on the positive outcomes of this heightened awareness: *"... I have noticed a change in the attention to bullying. Teachers are paying more attention. It is stopping the bullying behaviours"*. With the lack of teacher awareness being a major barrier to its prevention (Olweus, 1993; Pepler et al., 1993; Sharpe & Smith, 1994), any observable increase in attention to bullying is an important step in its elimination.

The interview results also suggest that as teachers became more sensitive to bullying incidents, students became more willing to expose bullies and speak out about violence: *"Yes, there is more of a focus on bullying this year. Some (students) will actually tell the teachers now (whereas before they wouldn't have told)"*. Another echoed this sentiment, relating the increased awareness some students had developed:

> *"The (teachers) have been talking about (bullying) more in class. There has been more of a focus on making sure that (bullying) doesn't happen, so (students) are more willing to talk to the teachers. I think (it has helped), teachers are more aware of (bullying). Sometimes you can do things and not mean it, but they can still hurt the other person"*.

Thus, some students seemed to have gained a better understanding of the consequences of bullying, which has translated into an increased sense of empathy and responsibility.

While acknowledging the teachers' efforts in detecting and stopping bullying, one student noted that more needed to be done to prevent such behaviours from occurring in the first place:

> *"Before when bullying happened, I don't think the teachers would have done all that much. I think the teachers are more aware (now) of what's going on, but I think they could probably still be doing more just in the final phase, which would be to stop the bad behaviour before it starts"*.

Of course, eliminating school violence completely takes many steps and much time. However, the school is in fact working towards this *final phase* of stopping inappropriate behaviour before it starts by aspiring to increase student empathy, respect, and responsibility through lessons, modelling, and continuous reinforcement.

## Conflict Resolution Skills

In the student interviews, conflict resolution was discussed in terms of potential student reactions to problems with other students. While I did not request that the respondents consider changes in their conflict resolution technique, I assumed that the answers would at least partially reflect what students had learned as a result of classroom discussions and activities prompted by the SACS Project.

Interestingly, responses to the question "*what would you do if you were in a conflict with another student?*" generally included obtaining a teacher's guidance at some point in the process. Most of the students interviewed said they would feel comfortable going to a teacher in the event of a problem with someone, with a minority specifying that they would attempt to settle it on their own first. Only one student stated that talking to a teacher would not be his/ her preferred method of solving a conflict. However, even this student conceded that he/ she would probably discuss any serious matters with school staff. These results are hopeful in comparison to other research that more clearly illuminates the persistence of the code of silence among students. For example, a study from Toronto found that less than half of secondary and elementary students (44% and 46% respectively) would talk to an adult if they had a problem (Pal & Day, 1991).

The ease with which the students would approach a teacher in the event of a conflict parallels the previously noted increase in willingness to inform an adult about bullying and school violence. While these outcomes can be linked to the increased focus on bullying, a connection may also be drawn to students' perceptions of staff interest over student well being. Since over 80% of the students generally felt cared for, listened to, and supported, and believed that staff was there for them when they needed help, the

level of confidence in staff concern was high. Presumably, students who feel supported and believe that their problems will be taken seriously are more likely to rely on adults for help.

Being perceived as capable of improving the situation helps make teachers a useful support for students. While their motivation for confiding in teachers varied, students felt that in most cases adult intervention would help ease the tension of conflict by reaching a more positive and peaceful outcome:

*"(Teachers) would make it easier, direct the conversation".*

*"Yes (talking does help to stop bullying) ... there are certain teachers students go to for help".*

*"(Teachers) try to help us figure out the problem, and see it both ways, and get (students) both in a room so they talk about it themselves".*

*"(Most students would go to a teacher) if it became a big problem. This usually would help solve the problem".*

Thus, most students felt that going to a teacher or administrator would help solve the situation because adults could help direct the discussion, suggest solutions, and *"tackle the problem right way"*. However, all qualified their responses by stating that it depends on the person. Each student recognized that some of their classmates are not deterred by suspensions or other school punishments; thus, informing staff of a conflict may not necessarily resolve it.

The issue of the invisibility of school violence was raised in a few of the comments. One student observed that

> *"(lessons in respect) help to a certain extent except for the students who are probably realizing that 'oh, well, I can probably do this two or three times without (staff) noticing' and then until the fourth or fifth time, they will probably have some sort of punishment and then 'I can just start over if I wait a month'".*

Another addressed the common reality of students simply engaging in hurtful behaviour out of adult reach:

*"some teachers try to stop (students from bothering or teasing others), but some teachers don't know it is going on because the students wait for the teacher to leave or turn around so they never notice. But usually (the teacher) would ask what is going on and try to fix the problem... or the principal talks to the students".*

The discrepancy between what teachers are aware of and what actually happens has been substantiated by other researchers. In a study from Toronto, 5% of teachers believed that tension usually exists among students, compared to 23% of students who felt this way (Brown et al., 1996). The same study found teachers more likely than students to think that students show respect towards one another (61% vs. 37%), that school rules are clear and fair (69% vs. 45%), that students follow the rules (55% vs. 28%), that teachers avert arguments from becoming fights (60% vs. 39%), and that students and teachers solve conflicts peacefully (80% vs. 43%). In light of other studies, these results are not surprising. Pepler & Craig (1997) found that teachers notice less than 10% of bullying incidents.

It becomes apparent, then, that many problems cannot be resolved by teachers alone. Despite both student and staff acknowledgement of the heightened awareness of and attention to bullying, we cannot presume that this will address every instance of violence and motivate each student to act appropriately all the time. The inability of social skills training to affect every child addresses the need for community and parental involvement. Educators attempting to effect a change in school culture must stay cognizant of the fact that school is just one of many influences on youth, and therefore only one of numerous elements that must work together to develop socially competent adults with non-violent social skills.

Although much of the discussion on conflict resolution skills thus far has focussed on teacher intervention, an essential element of these skills is the ability for students to use them without adult support. While it is very encouraging to see that SACS Project implementation resulted in more students being willing to seek adult support in solving a conflict, youth nevertheless need the skills to manage a disagreement on their own. This is especially crucial since many factors continue to hinder not only teacher involvement,

but also its influence on some students. In addition to the invisibility of much school violence, it remains apparent that many students are not prepared to report bullying to teachers for a variety of reasons. One interviewee justified why some students do not inform school staff of violent incidents. At first this respondent mentioned the fear of looking like a snitch:

> *"There is always the 'what happens after you talk to an adult about it' ... if that person says 'oh, you told a teacher', then that person is going to hold a grudge against you and no one wants that, so they'd rather try to solve it on their own ... but, sure, the teachers are there to help and that's what they are going to do".* (Researcher: Do you think many students feel the same way?) *"Yes".*

Later this student went on to say that youth generally prefer to work out any interpersonal tensions among themselves anyway.

> *"We don't go to the teachers to solve our problems, we solve them on our own time... We use our system of logic that we've come up and basically just try to work out the problem as best we can until its more or less resolved ... We don't see a point in going to the teachers, because they usually only have one or two ways of solving a problem so it just becomes repetitive. We'd much rather do that on our own time and avoid a whole bunch of trouble... Some students are going to talk to the teachers because they are a little more insecure ...It's a question of deciding and filtering out what you can tell the administration or when you're better off just solving problems on your own...If it's not going to be a problem where the school has to get involved, (students) try to keep it that way".*

Similar studies on the nature of bullying in schools have found that concern over making a bad situation worse or effecting no change at all would prevent the majority of students from telling an adult if they were bullied. Fear of retribution, fear of reproach for telling, feeling that the bullying would get worse, and the belief that telling someone would make no difference were the reasons given in 57% of student responses (Bidwell, 1997).

It remains likely, then, that students will continue to witness and experience more violent incidents out of the view of teachers, speaking to the necessity of involving all students in the goal of eliminating school violence. Since approximately 10% of these students experience some bullying, and at least another 60% are witness to these situations, students are in the most opportune position to address the bullying behaviours

of their classmates. Coupled with the evidence that self-proclaimed "peace-makers" were successful in stopping bullying approximately half of the time (Pepler & Craig, 1997), the need for more students to take a stand is obvious. Presumably, more developed skills in these students, as well as more peers to take the side of the victim, may have led to successful outcomes in even more of these situations. Unfortunately, without the extra support, skills, and understanding, most young bystanders are just as likely to participate aggressively, and on the side of the bully, as they are to mediate prosocially (Pepler & Craig, 1997).

These are precisely the motives underpinning the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project's focus on promoting effective social skills and responsibility among all students rather than directing attention exclusively to the perpetrator. By teaching conflict resolution skills to all students, together schools, communities, and parents can ensure that their children possess the tools necessary to handle difficult situations and reconcile conflict with others fairly and peacefully. With each student who develops a strong sense of empathy and responsibility, the likelihood that instances of bullying will be reported and stopped, or will not occur at all, increases. Of course, these skills can be of benefit to students in any personal interactions, not just those involving aggressive individuals. As disagreements are an inevitable part of life, especially for school children, each opportunity to deal with conflict appropriately increases a child's understanding of social values and enhances confidence in applying them to social situations, decreasing the chances that a disagreement will result in insult or injury.

**Behaviour Policy**

During the interviews I also asked students their thoughts on the effectiveness of the school's discipline policy, and invited suggestions for alternative approaches to student punishment. Several questions in the surveys also enquired into students' opinions of guidelines and behavioural expectations.

All interviewees had some idea about what might happen if a behavioural problem occurred. Most responded that at first a teacher or administrator would talk with the student involved, and suspension would follow if the behaviour continued. Opinions on the ability of suspensions to deter students from misbehaving were mixed, and many students actually expressed contradictory views on this topic. About half of the students at some point stated that suspensions did work, or would work for them. However these same students noted that those who misbehave the most are not deterred by suspensions because they are able to relax at home, and that these students usually do not care what their parents say:

> *"(Suspension) works because the students (who misbehave) are afraid of being suspended so they try to be on their best behaviour, but then things happen again (after two weeks). (Suspension) would stop me because my parents would be mad, but for some students, their parents don't do anything, so suspension doesn't stop them. There isn't really a way of stopping (those students)".*

Another student highlighted how contemporary social phenomena affect school policies.

> *"(In-school suspensions) do work, out-of-school suspensions don't work ... the only way it works is if you fear your parents ... that's not a fear for students in grade 7, 8, and 9. We don't care about that anymore. And especially since parents are working full-time everyday... you are at home. Wow. What are you going to do? You are going to sleep and be rested for the next day of school".*

The difference between in-school and out-of-school suspensions was raised by a few students. One explained that *"(in-school suspensions) work because you are alone all day"*. Another respondent added that *"(in-school suspensions) are worse than out-of-school because (the students) have to do lots of work and they can't relax at home*". This school currently prefers this type of suspension to suspensions served at home. However, possibly as a result of a renewed interest in safe and caring values, some teachers informed me that the staff is generally trying to avoid giving suspensions at all and is regarding them as a last resort.

Two teachers noted that in their classroom discussions about discipline and how to discourage inappropriate behaviour, many students indicated that morals and social awareness prevents them from misbehaving, especially when their actions would hurt

others. One student mentioned that many young people do not need a deterrent to realize that certain actions are wrong. Students usually will not engage in these behaviours simply because to do so would be inappropriate or inconsiderate. Thus, for many youth at this age, values are internalized, playing a larger role in guiding behaviour than policies or punishments do.

With respect to the behavioural policy reducing bullying behaviours, students again stressed that it depends on the student: *"Yes, (suspensions) would stop (bullying). I think it stops it (in our school), but there might be the odd person that doesn't care"*. Another student effectively summarized what is simultaneously a barrier to violence prevention and an argument for its necessity. *"If someone is determined to go and hurt someone else, nothing is going to stop them. They are just going to be clever about it and not do it at school"*.

The common feeling among interview respondents was that suspension deters those who would never get in trouble anyway, but this form of punishment does not dissuade the students who usually do get suspended. It is problematic, then, that the majority of school boards in Alberta, and across Canada, rely heavily on the suspension/ expulsion approach to discipline, and very few include policy statements stipulating alternatives to suspensions (Day et al., 1995). Regrettably, procedures for policy and program evaluation were also absent from most of the examined documents, suggesting that the revision of behavioural policies for most Canadian schools to a more effective system is not forthcoming (Day et al., 1995).

While it is not uncommon for students to criticize disciplinary measures of school staff, schools may do well to listen to student opinion, since it is the student body that the policy is trying to influence. One teacher noticed that many of the "good, quiet students" spoke up during a class conversation on punishment, observing that some seemed "fed up" because they felt that consequences delivered by staff are illogical and inconsistent. These students complained that many aspects of the discipline policy were not being enforced. Survey results generally upheld these feelings, revealing a more negative

outlook on the general behavioural guidelines. For example, when involved in a problem, only 33% of students felt that their side of the story is listened to *quite often* or *most of the time*. This leaves 67% who often feel like they do not have the opportunity to defend themselves or explain their position to the school staff. Similarly, 40% declared that school staff *seldom* or *never* attempt to find out why a student misbehaved before giving out consequences.

On a more positive note, 85% of the students said they were treated fairly by adults at least *once in a while*, with three quarters of these observing fair treatment *most of the time* or *quite often*. Unfortunately, when asked if consequences for misbehaviour help students learn a better way to behave, only 20% responded *most of the time* or *quite often*, with a disheartening 55% stating school consequences *seldom* or *never* teach youth a better way to act.

Other studies confirm students' concerns with meaningless or unreasonable punishments and unpredictable teacher behaviour. Respondents in the Alberta study were frustrated with what they considered illogical consequences for violent behaviour. Macdonald (1995) quoted one student as saying "(picking up garbage, sweeping floors, etc) doesn't make sense, and it doesn't do anything but make us angrier and hate the school more" (p. 7). Inconsistency also elicited anger and confusion. Students felt that irrelevant influences such as teacher mood, day of the week, weather, and attempts at impressing a colleague often dictated teacher reaction to student behaviour (Macdonald, 1995). "Although teachers encouraged students to come forward and report violence, they also punished students for getting involved" (Macdonald, 1995, p. 10). Thus, conflicting messages prompted students to withdraw and ignore their fellow students' problems rather than to show support or express concern.

Academics tend to agree with students, arguing that in order for consequences to be effective in preventing inappropriate behaviours, they must be meaningful and maintain a sense of respect and trust between adult and child. Berman (1997) discusses the benefits of teaching acceptable alternatives to misbehaviour and allowing students to

make reparations for their mistake. By pointing out consequences for themselves and others, informing children about acceptable standards of behaviour, stimulating empathy and reasoning, and communicating responsibility, adults express "a faith in the child's ability to comprehend, develop, and improve... heighten(ing) a child's sense of personal efficacy and responsibility" (Berman, 1997, p. 87).

Conversely, in punishing a child, adults convey disrespect and shame. This prompts students either to stop the behaviour in order to avert discipline and further humiliation, or to simply avoid getting caught next time. Any new *appropriate* behaviour emerges as a result of self-interest rather than a newly developed sense of empathy. Consequently, encouraging prosocial behaviours must take precedence over punishing poor conduct. The elusiveness of bullying and school violence will not be overcome by methods that rely on punishment as a behavioural deterrent. Strategies need to "regard discipline as an opportunity to teach students social skills, rather than as a way to punish social illiteracy" (MacDonald, 1995, abstract).

While the interviews and teacher comments indicate that several students have begun to benefit from teacher implementation of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, school improvement must include changes to the behavioural policy. Effort must be made to ensure that guidelines for disciplining students are fair, understood by staff and students, and applied consistently. In addition, disciplinary procedures must function hand in hand with more proactive learning approaches that encourage children to internalize prosocial values.

**Student Surveys: Comparing Pre-tests to Post-tests**

With respect to student surveys, any changes from pre-test to post-test were very small. In fact, many alternatives for each question increased or decreased by only a few percent. All other responses remained the same.

There are many possible explanations for this lack of change. Implementation of the SACS Project largely emerged as an increased focus on bullying. While teachers

discussed appropriate social and conflict resolution skills in their classes, they were often considered in relation to inappropriate behaviours, and how each type of behaviour would affect others. This heightened awareness of bullying behaviours allowed many students to recognize bullying, perhaps for the first time. This clearer understanding may have lead to an initial increase in the frequency of bullying incidents witnessed by students, which then may have been reduced when teachers began integrating SACS values into the curriculum.

Other elements that may have affected the quantitative results are the teachers' increased vigilance regarding bullying behaviours, and students' willingness to report bullying to teachers. Possibly counteracted by activities on respect and discussions stimulating feelings of empathy, it is difficult to identify which teaching strategies were most successful at affecting some change.

Studies assessing similar violence prevention programs have found equally surprising results. Aimed at increasing the level of social competence among youth, one evaluation of the Second Step program actually saw the total number of behavioural incidents increase in the second year of implementation (Madak & Bravi, 1992). This outcome led the researchers to speculate that the staff's heightened awareness of student misbehaviour may have been responsible.

# Chapter 6

# DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research has been to examine the process of implementing the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project at the junior high level. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed. Student interviews and teacher meetings gave me the opportunity to work more intimately with staff and students, allowing me to gain a higher level of trust and, consequently, a deeper insight into their perceptions. Surveys were conducted to provide data that were then used to ascertain trends and establish a baseline of the perceptions of initial school conditions.

I begin this chapter by discussing significant findings from both the teacher and student data. These are divided into the following sections: (1) Teachers' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Implementation, (2) Teachers' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Effectiveness, and (3) Students' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Effectiveness. I then offer implications for practice, which I subdivide into implications for program implementation and implications for conducting action research. I attempt to address the numerous challenges that may face schools aspiring to change through program implementation. I also review my experience in terms of the research process by exploring how action research served to guide program implementation. Next I discuss the significance of the research, its limitations, and recommendations for further research. I conclude with some final perspectives.

## Key Findings from the Research

Through the use of various data collection methods, I was able to draw on both student and teacher perspectives. This allowed for a broader, more comprehensive analysis of the SACS implementation process.

***Teachers' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Implementation***

Teachers' opinions and insights were collected over the course of the study to gauge changing impressions of the SACS implementation process. Initially, the teachers felt anxious about beginning the Project. Main concerns expressed were extra time, heavier workload, and apprehension towards working together as a team. These issues seemed to temper the enthusiasm that many of the teachers originally conveyed. Nevertheless, excitement varied widely, with some teachers expressing great interest and others seeming sceptical or somewhat indifferent.

Several challenges surfaced as the Project was introduced. Initially, implementation began with a needs assessment activity to determine what issues the teachers felt were most crucial for school improvement. In addition to identifying concerns, this activity was intended to facilitate goal-setting, making achievement more manageable and progress more evident. The main issues expressed were:

- the need for collaboration among staff,
- support from the administration,
- parental involvement,
- providing more specific instruction relating to values and social skills,
- stricter disciplinary guidelines, and
- the need to address actual behavioural problems occurring in school.

While possible goals and actions were discussed following the needs assessment activity and again after presenting teacher and student survey data, I did not initiate a formal action planning process. This would have stimulated group discussion regarding how to address these issues specifically, and may have given teachers an opportunity to express their interests in relation to specific goals. Because actions were only discussed generally, no specific duties were assumed by particular staff members other than the lead teacher, who had volunteered to head the Project within the school. Thus, only this teacher had particular, defined responsibilities related to the SACS Project. Despite visible teacher commitment to the vision of improving school atmosphere, lack of specific roles related to the intended outcome meant that the progress hinged on each

teacher's self-motivation and evolved according to seven individual ideas rather than one coordinated, agreed-upon plan. While self-accountability is borne out of a commitment towards some defined goal, ownership is more likely if individuals feel a responsibility to the group in helping determine the outcome (Halsall, 1998). For teachers overloaded with responsibilities and timelines, original enthusiasm towards the initial plan can diminish. As goals fall further out of reach, disillusionment can set in, and responsibilities become abandoned. In order for teacher commitment to persist, measures to sustain teacher involvement must be included in any plans for school improvement (Carter, 1998). Including teachers not only in creating the vision, but in sharing specific responsibilities related to group implementation of the action plan, would have helped to maintain the motivation necessary to move towards the common goal collectively.

In this case, a lack of defined responsibilities may have contributed to the inability of the action research process to address some of the identified concerns. For example, the collaborative effort proposed by staff did not proceed. Instead, efforts to create a more caring and respectful atmosphere were limited to teachers affecting students within their own classrooms, through the use of learning strategies and teaching practice. While several of the individual class activities proved to be effective in increasing student empathy and stimulating a caring atmosphere in class, a sequence of disconnected events will not serve to successfully transform the entire school culture (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; Halsall, 1998). Individual, piecemeal efforts do not create the same strong support system as does a unified, cooperative approach. This type of large scale improvement necessitates that all school staff work together to ensure objectives are clear, agreed upon, and executed consistently.

Frost et al., (2000) list several characteristics of collaboration that facilitate holistic approaches to school improvement. First of all, they claim that collaboration provides the moral support that is especially important in the initiation of action research. Once the process has commenced, a group that works together can help one another stay focussed on the mutual goals while dealing with conflicting priorities and daily responsibilities, sustaining project momentum. An initiative that is not explicitly

addressed regularly is easily overlooked or disregarded. Finally, these authors suggest collaboration be used as an effective means of managing change and developing new strategies through shared experiences and diverse perspectives.

Support from administration was another need identified at the onset of Project implementation. Since it can take various forms, administrative support is difficult to measure from the outside. To me, as an external researcher, it appeared as though the responsibility of maintaining Project progress within the school rested mainly with one individual. While the administration conveyed interest in the Safe and Caring Schools initiative and believed in the value of character education, the lead teacher in the SACS Project (also an administrator) organized teacher meetings and ensured that the SACS philosophy maintained a presence within school practice.

In addition to the encouragement of administration, mutually supportive relationships with families and the greater community is one of the foundations of effective school wide intervention (Algozzine, 2002). Unfortunately, the lack of collaborative effort among school staff probably also affected their ability to obtain parental involvement, an element which potentially requires a deliberate, concerted school effort and great deal of work. At the end of the study, both teachers and administrators acknowledged that parental involvement had not been sought, and thus was not achieved. While parents were informed of the Project at the beginning of the school year, no other attempts were made to include the community in the new initiative. With teacher and administrator workloads steadily increasing over the course of the year, deciding how to involve parents and then taking steps to accomplish this may have seemed an arduous task given the likelihood of success. Given the infrequency of regular parental participation in the day to day operations of most schools, teachers may feel that, though an important element, parental involvement might not be worth the extra effort. Discussions with some teachers led me to believe that previous attempts at engaging parents in other school initiatives had been largely unsuccessful, lowering the confidence that additional attempts would bear fruit. As the researcher, I could have played a larger role in establishing the community connection. Introducing and organizing the series of

five community workshops offered by the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project directly to the community and parents might have sparked some interest, potentially leading to greater parental involvement.

The challenge schools face in obtaining parental involvement speaks to the difficulty of establishing connections between two societal institutions that have existed separately for centuries. Entrenched within traditional notions of education as an institution responsible for teaching the "three Rs", the disconnect between home and school perpetuates the distance between teachers and parents, and makes any partnership difficult to establish. Misperceptions held by both groups function to maintain this separation by precluding either group from collectively seeking a change. Many parents still feel as though they have no business interfering with school operations. Unfortunately, this translates to a detachment that many teachers may perceive as disinterest. Conversely, some teachers may prefer parental detachment with respect to school business, as this approach maintains teachers' complete autonomy and allows them to continue with the routine and methods to which they are accustomed. However, while initially requiring more effort and time, a parent-teacher partnership can eventually lead to several benefits. In violence prevention programs that intimately included parents, both teachers and parents reported decreases in problem behaviour and increases in adaptive behaviour in elementary students (Kay, Fitzgerald, & McConaughy, 2002). In other schools, similar parent-teacher partnerships resulted in improved communication, enhanced parenting skills, an increase in parental assistance in the classroom, and a heightened overall parental participation in school activities (Halsall, 1998). Parental involvement becomes especially important for the SACS Project, which is based on the philosophy that all adults should model and reinforce mutual respect and prosocial skills. Thus parents need to be equally aware of the values and behaviours they are encouraging through their daily interactions and methods of discipline.

Without the necessary attention, these challenges may have hindered the progress of school improvement. Coupled with the initial anxieties of starting a new school initiative, certain aspects of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project such as whole

school collaboration and community involvement were not yet addressed during the first year of implementation. However, as one of the principal components of SACS, character education and social skills instruction was identified needs that did receive special attention throughout the year. In fact, recognizing important prosocial values and encouraging their use through modelling and reinforcement became the primary strategy for creating a safe and caring environment. The teachers reinforced the importance of respect, responsibility, and teamwork during class discussions and through the use of cooperative learning methods. Because these approaches integrate the Safe and Caring Schools philosophy into teaching practice efficiently, the teachers did not see a need to access additional SACS resources. They felt they had the ability to modify their methods sufficiently to allow values to be integrated into the curriculum without the use of the SACS lesson plans.

Discussion of values was used to establish consistency and clearer expectations, and to place responsibility for behaviour with the student. Both positive and negative behaviours were targeted. For example, a teacher might have commended a student for expressing an opinion, praising them for remaining respectful to those who held other conflicting views. Alternatively, teachers may have asked students identified for misbehaving to specify which value was broken, and encouraged them to conceive of a means of reconciliation. Not only were notions of empathy and respect used to discourage bullying behaviours, but teachers' own heightened awareness of respect allowed them to deal with misbehaviour in alternative ways. Punitive disciplinary actions were replaced by logical consequences. Dialogue was preferred over suspensions, as more teachers favoured guiding the students in determining their own resolution. Victims were encouraged to share their feelings, while perpetrators were given the opportunity to make restitution instead of being punished. In these situations, conflict resolution skills and language empowered both students to manage the conflict together.

***Teachers' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Effectiveness***

Opinions about the effectiveness of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project, as implemented by the junior high teachers, were based on teachers' comments regarding student behaviour, school atmosphere, and general impressions of the initiative.

Careful use of particular terms and specific language increased general school awareness of safe and caring values. All staff began speaking in terms of these values in their classes on a daily basis. One teacher noted that simply identifying unacceptable behaviours in terms of the value broken stressed the basis for teacher intervention and provided all individuals involved in the conflict with the language to resolve it themselves. This staff member explained: *"the victims and the aggressors now had the same language to address issues in order to communicate and make headway in the proper direction leading toward behaviour modification"*.

Teachers found class discussions on respect and social skills useful and enlightening. It was during these activities that some confirmed their suspicions that many of the students did not have a clear understanding of what respect was, never mind how to demonstrate it. Teachers also found that the notion of bullying was met with the same uncertainty. After realizing student comprehension was low, teachers targeted specific values in attempts to improve understanding. For example, in one class, students were asked to share what types of jokes and actions they found hurtful. The teacher observed that this discussion allowed students to recognize respect as determined by what others feel as much as it is shaped by what we think it is. In other class activities, bullying behaviours were specifically described and were discussed in terms of which values the actions were violating. Again focussing on individual perspectives, this lesson reinforced the notion of empathy and the importance of mutual respect.

Teachers noted that some students seemed to become more aware of how others perceived their comments and actions and, also, how others treated them. Not only did these lessons serve to decrease disrespectful behaviour by stimulating empathic feelings,

they also highlighted the significance of students' feelings. Thus, self esteem simultaneously received a boost, as students could better recognize when they were being bullied or disrespected, feeling confident that they deserved respect. In addition to a heightened sense of self worth, the class activities gave students tools with which to deal with others' behaviours effectively but respectfully. While these effects were not seen across all junior high students, it was felt that this was nevertheless an important start.

The focus on values education and social skills allowed staff to address the behavioural problems that were also identified as an issue in need of resolving. Both students and staff noticed that students became more likely to report school violence following a heightened understanding of bullying. One teacher noted *"students toward the end of the year felt more comfortable talking about situations of abuse if they saw themselves or others victimized by bullies*". Consequently, school staff became more able to intervene in bullying incidents. The increased tendency to inform adults about bullying behaviour is extremely important, as the lack of adult awareness of bullying remains a significant barrier to effective violence prevention (ATA, 2003; Brown et al., 1996; Pepler & Craig, 2000).

From my observations, teachers also increased their sensitivity towards students' issues and perceptions. While the concern about student well-being was certainly evident prior to SACS implementation, and ultimately is what prompted interest in the Project, I believe that the opportunities to listen to the students discuss their opinions on values, behavioural problems, and school policies likely gave the staff a new awareness of issues and experiences that existed. For example, some students discussed the extra responsibilities youth in contemporary society hold when both parents work, prompting a teacher to comment on the burden this must be on students' academic achievement and extracurricular experiences. As teachers examined their revelations from certain class discussions, I sensed a deeper understanding of students' needs. This speaks to the importance of teachers changing along side of their students (Casella & Burstyn, 2002).

While an increased awareness of values and misbehaviours, and students' understanding of these, was noticed throughout the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project implementation, at the end of the year a majority of the staff felt that the school culture remained mostly unaffected. Given that change in school culture takes up to seven years, this was not surprising. However, the teachers agreed that while general student behaviour had not been significantly changed, a transformation in school atmosphere had indeed been triggered by the SACS initiative, and could gradually gain momentum. Staff who provided additional feedback agreed that the Project should continue as more time was needed to begin observing the internalization of respect, responsibility, and other SACS values in the general student population.

***Students' Perceptions of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project Effectiveness***

Student perceptions of SACS effectiveness were drawn from the interviews. With a focus on changes in adult and student behaviour, student interview data reflected the general school atmosphere, the school's behavioural policy, and the perceived effects of integrating values into class activities. While class activities varied, the character education component largely took the form of identifying prosocial values and correcting actions that violate these principles. Most students could recall specific lessons on values and were confident in their explanations of why these ideals were important in our society. While certainly not enough to ensure that all children will actually apply prosocial values to their own situations, understanding these values is an important first step in their internalization. More importantly however, some students did feel that these lessons had in fact triggered a positive change in class interactions, suggesting that some internalization of values had taken place. These interviewees noted that student behaviour towards one another greatly improved due to an increase in empathy and sensitivity to individual views.

The fact that other interviewees did not observe an improvement in student behaviour speaks to the variability across individuals and highlights the necessity of perseverance, continuity, and integration of character education. Many of the students echoed this disparity, mentioning throughout their interview that certain students were

affected more than others, and that student reactions to particular lessons or behavioural strategies always depended upon the person. Teaching social skills and values is analogous to teaching any other skill in that some students will understand before others. Thus, repetition will benefit students in values education in the same way that it facilitates gaining other knowledge. The difference is that social values can also be easily demonstrated and modeled, allowing continuous reinforcement through any lesson. It is this characteristic that renders character education suitable for a holistic, integrated approach to school improvement.

In some of the lessons on values, students were asked to share their ideas of what jokes, comments, or actions they found disrespectful. One teacher used this after discovering from the survey results that almost all students perceived themselves as respectful and friendly to their peers all of the time, whereas many had responded that they had been teased, bothered, or bullied themselves, or had seen others who had. Apparently this activity was an eye-opener for many of the students who had never considered their behaviours to be offensive. The teacher explained how some students expressed surprise upon hearing what their classmates found offensive, and that the majority appeared attentive to the responses of others. Reactions suggested that students had in fact offended their peers numerous times, seemingly unintentionally. A few students alluded to this exercise in the interviews, asserting that some students did respect the views of others following the activity, decreasing disrespectful behaviours among students. This further attests to the ability of junior high students to internalize values being reinforced in class, stressing the importance of eliciting empathy in this process.

Other students described teachers' use of cooperative learning strategies to promote effective social interactions. The fact that a few of the students recognized the motive behind this approach demonstrates the insight that some junior high students have into the teaching-learning process. Even if the teacher had explained the purpose of the lesson to the class, it is important to recognize student awareness of the processes to which they are exposed.

Most students expressed a willingness to go to a teacher in the event of a problem or a conflict, rationalizing that teachers would help ease the tension of interpersonal conflict by facilitating a positive and peaceful resolution. This parallels the reported increase in student willingness to inform adults about bullying. Given the pervasiveness of the so-called code of silence among secondary school students (ATA, 2003; Pepler & Craig, 2000), it is significant that these students felt comfortable going to school staff for guidance or to inform them of school violence. This willingness illustrates the positive state of the general teacher-student relationship in this school. First of all, it suggests teacher competence in handling student problems. Presumably, had students experienced negative outcomes to reporting prior incidents, or had they heard about others who had, they would not support this somewhat unlikely practice. Teacher competence in turn leads to student security, which translates into student well being. Students who feel safe and cared for at school have a predisposition to learning (ATA, 2003). It also means students have an adult they trust. This becomes especially important in the event of a problem or conflict, or if the student witnesses someone else in a situation that may warrant adult intervention. Conversely, this willingness to report problems provides teachers with more access to student conflict, enabling them to intervene more often, and to better address potential bullying behaviours in class. Given the complexity of the student-teacher relationship, the confidence these students possess in their teachers' ability to support them is crucial to the effective implementation of a violence prevention program (Casella, 2001).

Naturally, in the effort to model and reinforce respect and responsibility, teachers focussed on their own behaviours and interactions with students. Accordingly, most students did notice what they considered to be positive changes in adult behaviour. Interviewees stated that they noticed teachers displaying an increased sensitivity to the occurrence of bullying incidents, and an obvious interest in preventing them. A few students also mentioned teachers being more open to discussing student problems and issues. These changes further speak to the positive effects of improving teacher-student relationships.

During the interviews, students seemed to radiate a confidence in their awareness and comprehension of the values discussed. While they may have had a prior understanding of why respect and responsibility are important within society, this focus on values education seemed to strengthen students' comprehension. Focusing on the school's values and increasing the awareness of bullying led the school staff to more purposeful modelling of appropriate behaviours, demonstrating to students the significance of empathy, respect, and consideration within interpersonal interactions. However, while both teacher and student data indicate some school improvement, it is clear that much work still needs to be done to maintain the changes and continue progressing towards a safe and caring atmosphere for all.

## Implications for Practice

In this section, I address the numerous challenges that face schools intending to improve school atmosphere through program implementation. Then I explore how the action research process and ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project implementation influenced each other.

### *Implementing a Violence Prevention Program*

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project is rooted in a philosophy of mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution, and personal responsibility. It aims to foster these in children by training and encouraging adults to teach, model, and reinforce safe and caring values in all aspects of a child's life. The SACS initiative is based on the belief that non-violent behaviours must be taught and reinforced consistently in order for children to learn to apply this philosophy to their own lives. Generally, these are values that teachers and schools already adhere to and practice. Unfortunately, while conviction in the importance of mutual respect and responsibility may be ubiquitous, many schools lack the structure necessary to ensure that these values do in fact develop in all students.

Many attributes must be present in a school for learning and teaching to occur in a caring, nurturing, and respectful environment. Highlighted throughout this report,

elements such as staff collaboration, parental involvement, student empowerment, cooperative learning strategies, and the fair and consistent use of non-punitive behavioural guidelines have been identified as necessary aspects of safe and caring schools (ATA, 1997; Algozzine, 2002; Burstyn & Stevens, 2001). These elements are vital to the effective implementation of any school improvement process (Carter, 1998). However, most schools, rooted in traditional educational principles, have failed to adequately replace current practices upholding competition and individualism with structures that favour the development and preservation of more altruistic values.

The effects of the hidden curriculum on students have long been acknowledged (Apple, 1996; Giroux, 1988). Inherent within school structure and teaching methods, underlying values teach students acceptable ways of behaving and interacting. Essentially, they demonstrate what is valued by society. Unfortunately, in contemporary society, the principles entrenched within social institutions are often not the ideals we purport to value. We claim to appreciate diverse abilities and then base achievement only on test scores. We claim to value collaboration and then require students to compete against one another for the best mark or for one of few spots on a sports team. We demand equality and then reward the most successful individuals.

While cooperation is integral to a successful society, competition and preparation for victory still characterizes much of the current state of education (Kohn, 1992). Casella & Burstyn (2002) discuss the power schools have in reinforcing values that counter mutual respect, empathy, and non-violent behaviour. They explain that "there is much in school that causes students to learn the naturalness of competition, segregation, and even aggressive behavior" (p. 99). Assessing achievement with test scores and grading systems, and separating students by ability, reinforces achieving success by defeating others. This type of success does not allow for cooperation, as each student is responsible only for his or her own advancement, and the achievement of others interferes with their own status. Meanwhile, many sports, also known for reinforcing competitive spirit, require aggression in order to ensure success. While some might argue the value of sports

in encouraging the notion of teamwork, genuine cooperative spirit is difficult to achieve in a situation that only allows one winner.

While several problematic practices are known to be entrenched within education, modifying them continues to pose a problem for educators. In exposing the various customs that encourage competition and self-promotion, Casella & Burstyn (2002) ask:

> What is there, then, that teaches students peace and conflict resolution–what foregrounds these topics as important to us? If violence prevention is not integrated in the academic curriculum, it becomes an add-on approach, and what is taught then to students is that peace and conflict resolution are ancillary, incidental to academic subject areas, and to the skewed, sometimes unjust ways they are taught. When students learn subjects in school in ways that promote aggressiveness, or if they are not taught that aggressiveness is wrong, then we have lost sight of a key goal of education, which is to provide citizens with the capabilities to be a part of a civil and democratic society. (p. 100)

Thus, the significance of working together for the mutual benefit of society must be emphasized within school practice. After all, it is "cooperation and association that enable the human species to survive and culture to evolve" (Reardon & Nordland, 1994).

Predictably, the successful implementation of anti-violence programs may be hindered when its underlying philosophy comes into conflict with the values in which the school system is rooted. The hierarchical structures--between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and students of different grades and abilities--impede the sharing of ideas necessary for mutual agreement and involvement of all participants. Rather, the power imbalance that is inherent to this hierarchy functions to maintain one group's authority over the other. As well, the social hierarchies perpetuated in schools, which identify certain students as intelligent and others as incapable, run counter to cooperative learning strategies that focus on diverse strengths and sharing talents.

Because schools typically operate independently, community involvement is difficult to obtain. Outside involvement has traditionally been very limited, ensuring a school's autonomy, but also its stagnancy. Schools usually do not work together to share resources, ideas, or programs, and instead are in the habit of competing against one

another for students, funding, top test scores, high averages, and triumphant sports teams. Currently, many forces in society serve to sustain an atmosphere of competition and aggression, making the need for a concerted effort towards a cooperative society even more pronounced. Thus, it is important to view any attempt at school change as an attempt to improve the school culture, including its underlying belief system:

> To have a measurable impact on youth violence, it is necessary to change not only individual cognitive, social or behavioural factors, but also the factors that potentially shape belief systems, thoughts and behaviours. Behaviour can be modified directly, it can be modified by influencing the close, interpersonal relationships of young people, and it can be shaped by modifying the proximal social contexts young people move through. To prevent youth violence, it is important to start in infancy, and act during all of the development stages of young people, from early childhood, to middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. (Mercy et al., 2002)

In the same way that certain teaching strategies and achievement measures promote competition, jealousy, and resentment, other approaches encourage cooperation, empathy, and the desire to facilitate rather than hinder the success of others. Reardon and Nordland (1994) credit the recent recognition that "cooperation is a basic component of all sustainable social systems" (p. 30) with the growth of the cooperative learning movement. They argue that most of the common learning objectives pursued in schools can be achieved by cooperative methods. By emphasizing active, student-centred learning, and mutually beneficial student contact, cooperative learning methods effectively foster caring, respectful interactions while supporting the notion of students being responsible for their own learning. More explicitly, it is a method of teaching that "uses human diversity and complementarity in a mutually advantageous way... and... provides experience that teaches appreciation of diversity and community building in the most practical way, by involving learners in setting and striving for a common goal approached from diverse perspectives within a context of multiple possibilities" (Reardon & Nordland, 1994, p. 32). They assert that allowing individual strengths to shine and weaknesses to be replaced by the abilities of others makes this learning experience more rewarding for all participants.

Active participation of all members of a community is another basic principle of the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project (ATA, 2003), and of effective violence prevention in general (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; Carter, 1998). In advocating the involvement of the entire school staff, as well as of parents, students, and the greater community, SACS aims to include all people in creating a caring, responsible, and socially aware society (ATA, 2003). This highlights the notion of education as an active process and a shared experience. Not just about teachers imparting knowledge, it requires that individuals take responsibility for their actions and their learning (Hamston & Murdoch, 1996) and for the education and well being of all children (ATA, 1997). In this way, active participation facilitates each particular group's involvement in general learning outcomes as well as any attempts at school improvement. This fosters a sense of commitment that in turn drives individual responsibility in helping to achieve the intended outcome. In doing so, it prepares students for an active and critical role not only in their education, but in the world.

***Implications for Action Research***

With its reliance on planning, action, observation, and continuous reflection, the action research process becomes appropriate for any attempt at school improvement (ATA, 2000). McLean (1995) argues that action research can effect a positive change irrespective of the program being implemented. In this study, the interdependent, continuous nature of the research process did not always guarantee change. This may have been because formal collaboration for Project implementation and discussions regarding reflection and action implementation were infrequent. Since reflection seemed to mainly emerge as individual, informal contemplation, this practice alone did not always lead to new actions. When it did lead to change, it was one teacher deciding on his/ her own rather than a group decision to try something new. Nevertheless, the same qualities that render action research effective in influencing change did allow for some progress and helped to achieve positive outcomes.

By definition, the action research process requires teachers to guide and control the implementation process, thereby necessitating teacher involvement and reflection

throughout. This is crucial for any school improvement endeavour, which should always be led and shaped by teachers. For my study, the process began with the junior high staff identifying issues in need of improvement, and then informally discussing a potential plan of action. Soon after the teachers began implementing safe and caring values within their classes, results from student surveys served to complement the needs identified by the teachers. The survey data provided staff with a new insight into student perceptions regarding adult behaviour, disciplinary procedures, and the nature of the school in general. Teachers became motivated to discuss these issues in class, encouraging students to share their views and experiences of respect, responsibility, and bullying. While the use and frequency of class activities devoted to values education depended upon each teacher, all staff spoke of at least a few entire classes where safe and caring values were the topic of discussion. At other times, teachers integrated lessons on particular principles into their particular subjects. For example, one teacher described discussing examples of disrespect and respect in history. In addition, an increased attention to the values underlying general teaching practice and learning strategies was observed by both teachers and students.

While some manuals on action research cite the advantages of having an external researcher (McLean, 1995), Calhoun (1994) stresses that, while it is in the interest of many to reshape and improve the education system, "the process cannot be conducted by persons external to the school. The school is where the renewal happens, and the process begins with (the educators). (They) are the ones to reform first" (p. 4). This reiterates the importance of continuous teacher involvement in initiating, and maintaining, school improvement. As well, I think it identifies a possible explanation for the challenges I encountered as an external researcher attempting to influence a successful, sustained change in school culture "...that can only come about through those who are responsible for its implementation" (Halsall, 1998, p. 41). While I used the action research process precisely to ensure teacher control, I soon realized that teacher involvement could not be guaranteed by this approach. Rather, it is up to each individual teacher to decide how much time and effort, if any, they will expend on the endeavour. However, before any strong commitment develops, teachers need to believe in the change they will be

attempting to implement. Only then will their values and teaching practice begin to parallel the intended goals.

Calhoun (1994) exposes the fact that, in the process of school renewal, the group initiating the plan often wants others to change without giving much thought to their own attitude shift. Speaking as an educator attempting to implement a plan for school improvement, she states: "we are far less clear that we are actually asking ourselves to change. Many of us wish to fix, speed up, or remove others who appear to us to impede progress" (Calhoun, 1994, p. 4). Both action research and the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project are useful in this regard, as both dictate that the group implementing the change should look within their own practice first, stressing that school improvement will stem from their own transformation. Action research tries to accomplish this through the continuous process of implementation, reflection, and change. The SACS Project encourages teaching children respect and responsibility by modelling and demonstrating appropriate behaviours. In this way, SACS requires that all adults focus on themselves, prompting change within their own behaviour before they can expect it of others. From my observations, staff did in fact attempt to change their own teaching practice, focussing on the values underlying their strategies and their reactions to student behaviour.

To initiate the change in adult beliefs and behaviours, Halsall (1998) emphasizes the need for the school staff to develop new knowledge and skills that support the attitudes and beliefs underlying the intended school improvement. While the SACS Project did provide an initial workshop on bullying, not all teachers were in attendance. Aside from a meeting explaining action research, no other attempts at advancing staff knowledge related to bullying, character education, or the SACS Project occurred. While the process would have been better served had additional opportunities for relevant professional development been offered, lack of available time precluded the staff from receiving more external support and information. Again this highlights the need for teachers to not only understand the purpose of the proposed change, but be committed to the process. This dedication arises out of a belief in the necessity for change, an

understanding of the proposed strategies, and an involvement in the planning and implementation process from its inception (Calhoun, 1994).

Despite the many challenges, action research benefited SACS Project implementation in its use of various data collection methods to identify current needs and measure progress. Researchers stress the need for evaluation within any violence prevention program (Burstyn & Stevens, 2001; RESOLVE, 2002) and for school improvement in general (Carter, 1998). Procedures for policy and program evaluation, including measures for self-evaluation, ensure that the progress and impact is monitored and that areas for further development are identified (Day et al., 1995). Action research provides the structure and procedures for continuous evaluation. This allows the school community to observe progress, maintaining motivation to continue while highlighting any areas of concern.

## Significance of the Research

Character education has become a key component of several violence prevention programs currently being implemented across Canada (ATA, 2003; BCEd, 2002; Safe Schools Manitoba, 2003). While critics accuse such initiatives of indoctrinating values, principles such as respect, compassion, fairness, and responsibility are believed to be universally accepted by all cultures (Gibbs & Earley, 1994; Lickona, 1993). Lickona eloquently justifies teaching children these ethical values when stating:

> Such values affirm our human dignity, promote the good of the individual and the common good, and protect our human rights. They meet the classic ethical tests of reversibility (would you want to be treated this way?) and universalizability (would you want to be treated this way in a similar situation?). They define our responsibilities in a democracy, and they are recognized by all civilized people and taught by all enlightened creeds. Not to teach children these core ethical values is a grave moral failure. (1993, p. 9)

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project is rooted in the belief that teaching these socially accepted values will help students develop into peaceful, responsible

individuals. Based on the recommendations of several academics and researchers, SACS has developed a comprehensive program consisting of workshops, resources, and on-line lesson plans to assist schools in integrating universal social values into their daily practice.

This study provides a detailed analysis of the SACS implementation process used by seven junior high teachers in one school. Data on how the staff chose to promote SACS values and how student attitudes and school atmosphere changed are valuable for several groups. First of all, the staff at the school site used the student data and the opportunities to share teaching ideas to focus their goals for school improvement, create individual plans for action, and, ultimately, observe which changes were taking place. Given that action research was used to collect data and implement SACS values, continuous staff input was required to maintain the Project and research progress. By illustrating some initial change, the final data can also help this school maintain commitment to the SACS Project, reviving momentum for the upcoming school year.

Secondly, other educators and administrators could use this research to determine effective strategies for achieving improvement within their own schools. Observing which processes were used by other school staff, including the challenges faced and the matters that required further attention, may assist other educators in planning for their own change.

Finally, the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project will use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment tool, resources, and general processes of Project implementation.

## Limitations

1. To allow for a comprehensive analysis, examining both teacher and student perceptions, one school was studied.
2. In order for the program to be desirable for the school, rather than imposed from an external source, the school site was chosen purposefully. Site selection was

determined by previous interest the school had expressed in implementing the SACS Project.

3. In order for data collection methods to allow for an in-depth examination of teaching process, issues, and outcomes from the perspective of both teachers and students, the study was delimited to only the junior high level.
4. Using interviews presents some limitations to a study (Gall et al., 1996). In particular, interview situations are difficult to standardize, creating the problem of subjectivity and researcher bias, which may influence data collection and analysis. However, surveys were used to supplement this data. Making use of a quantitative method provided the standardization and structure necessary to balance the qualitative data with larger scale results.
5. Teacher data gathered were limited to what teachers said to me during scheduled meetings. As it was a focus group setting, some may have felt uncomfortable sharing conflicting opinions, or their responses may have be influenced by the presence of others.
6. Time constraints due to teachers' busy schedules and allowing for the input of seven individuals limited the amount of data I received from teacher meetings.
7. Research has found that comprehensive change of a school culture can take up to seven years. While the project will hopefully continue at the selected school, for the sake of time, data were gathered over one school year only.

## Recommendations for Further Research

With the repositioning of violence as a concern within the realm of education, numerous violence prevention programs have been initiated in schools across Canada. While increased public interest has prompted research on the prevalence of bullying and violence in schools, specific initiatives aimed at addressing these issues must include an evaluative process. With this component missing or being overlooked from many school initiatives, studies examining their effectiveness at achieving intended goals are desperately needed. Moreover, attempts to standardize the methods of data collection (ie. the use of similar assessment tools, comparable measures of behaviours, and equivalent

definitions) would allow for a more meaningful comparison of initiatives and strategies for improvement. Such uniformity could facilitate a national analysis examining the actual extent of school violence across Canada.

There is also a need for more longitudinal studies within prevention program research. These would more clearly demonstrate the changes in school culture following violence prevention program implementation over a longer period of time. Research spanning several years could especially capture the extent of school improvement. Follow-up studies would also reveal whether the initiative being evaluated maintained momentum without the research component, and could explore the extent to which students internalized the ideals underpinning the change.

Additional case studies examining the process of violence prevention program implementation would add to this particular study by illustrating new methods of achieving goals. Taking into account this study's challenges, similar research could provide additional data regarding specific strategies for school improvement, making subsequent endeavours more focussed and efficient. As an additional benefit, research demonstrating positive outcomes has the potential of sharing not only ideas, but also hope and confidence for teachers in creating change themselves.

## Concluding Perspectives

As the primary sites for sociocultural knowledge, schools can provide the training ground either for bullying and violence, or for respect, responsibility, and peace. As such, the importance of teaching children conflict resolution skills and socially acceptable behaviour has implications beyond the classroom. While the importance of students possessing the skills necessary to redirect aggression and treat one another with respect is obvious, it is the extension of these lessons into their adolescent and adult lives that affects society.

An environment where conflict resolution skills and respectful behaviours are continuously reinforced, modeled, and encouraged, will ensure that these values develop as an integral part of the maturing student. By encouraging strategies that promote achievement without competition, self-confidence without aggression, and cooperation without sacrificing one's own success, the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project has the potential to prevent school violence while achieving academic success.

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## Appendix A

## THE SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

The *philosophy* of the SACS initiative as outlined by Alberta Education (1999) is that:

1) children develop non-violent values and behaviours when non-violence is taught and reinforced consistently by the important adults in their lives;
2) young people learn to apply safe and caring values to all aspects of their lives when these values are integrated into the school curriculum and reinforced throughout the school, home and community;
3) children need to take responsibility for regulating their own behaviour;
4) adults influence children's behaviour through example; and
5) all adults in the community are responsible for the community's children.

(Alberta Education, 1999, p.57)

The *objectives* sought by the SACS initiative are to:

1) provide consistent behavioural expectations throughout the school, home, and community;
2) model, support and reinforce these same expectations at home, in school and in the community;
3) integrate safe and caring values across the curriculum;
4) view incidents of misbehaviour as opportunities to teach social skills;
5) always respond to misconduct when it occurs, and respond in ways that maintain the rights and dignity of all concerned;
6) empower children to take responsibility for regulating their own behaviour;
7) give children the opportunity to resolve problems caused by their own behaviour; and
8) encourage students, through example, to show self-discipline and an ethic of caring.

(Alberta Education, 1999, p.57)

Appendix B

# FACULTIES OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

## Graduate Student Application for Ethics Review

**Name:** ANDREA SPEVAK **Student ID:** 0204990

**E-mail:** aspevak@ualberta.ca

**Project Title:**

A Case Study of a Safe and Caring School

**Project Deadlines:**

Starting date APRIL, 2002 Ending date MAY, 2003

If your project goes beyond the ending date, you must contact the REB in writing for an extension.

**Status:**

☐ Master's Project X☒ Master's Thesis ☐ Doctoral Thesis ☐ Other: (Specify)

The applicant agrees to notify the Research Ethics Board in writing of any changes in research design after the application has been approved.

A. Spevak
Signature of Applicant Date Feb. 20, 2002

The supervisor of the study or course instructor approves submission of this application to the Research Ethics Board.

André P. Grace
Signature of Supervisor/Instructor Date Feb. 25, 2002

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ETHICS REVIEW STATUS

☑ Review approved by Unit Statutory member/Alternate

☐ Review approved by Research Ethics Board

☐ Application not approved

[illegible]
Signature of REB Member Date Feb 25/02

FACULTIES OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

## Ethics Review Summary Form

**Name:** Andrea Spevak

**Project Title:** A Case Study of a Safe and Caring School

| ASSESSMENT | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the researcher provide a clear statement of what is to be done? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 2. Are the data collection procedures clearly specified? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 3. Have copies of instruments or samples of items to be used, including tests, interview guides, observational schedules been provided? [In the case of well-known instruments, provide the name only.] | ☒ | ☐ |
| 4. Is there a clear explanation of the involvement of human participants? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 5. If underage, legally incompetent, or other "captive" subjects are used, has their right and that of their parents/guardians to opt out been attended to? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 6. Has provision been made for explaining the nature, length and purpose of the research to the participants and/or guardians? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 7. Has the matter of informed written consent of participants been attended to? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 8. Has the right to opt out at any time without penalty been provided? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 9. Are the procedures for providing anonymity and confidentiality acceptable? | ☒ | ☐ |
| 10. Is it clear that the study will not be harmful or threatening to the participants or others? | ☒ | ☐ |

11. Please specify any other aspect of the study that needs special ethical consideration.

**a. The university expects that data will be retained for a period of 5 years from the completion of the research.**

Statutory member's recommendation:

☒ Approve ☐ Refer to REB

☐ Resubmit with the following changes:

Signature of REB member — February 25, 2002 Date

Signature of committee member — Date

## Appendix C

## TEACHER SURVEY

**This survey is intended to determine your initial feelings going into the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project.**

**This is an anonymous survey. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS SURVEY.**

*1) Please circle the words that indicate your PRESENT FEELINGS AND PERCEPTIONS about* implementing the Safe and Caring Schools Project within your school.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *a) I feel* excited *about the possibilities:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *b) I feel* confident *that the program will have a positive effect on the* students' behaviours & attitudes*:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *c) I feel* confident *that the process of SACS implementation will have a positive effect on the* teachers*:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *d) I think the SACS program will improve the entire school atmosphere:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *e) I feel* worried *about the extra workload:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *f) I feel* up *for the challenge:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *g) I think that the SACS program* applies *to my subject:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *h) I think that I am* already teaching *safe & caring principles:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *i) I need to know more about the SACS program:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |

*2) Please circle the words that indicate your PRESENT FEELINGS AND PERCEPTIONS about* the prospect of collaborating with other junior high teachers in your school.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *a) I feel* excited *about the possibilities:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *b) I feel* confident *that we will get our work accomplished as a team:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *c) I feel* worried *about the time it will take:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *d) I think we are* already working together *so there is no concern:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *e) I feel* eager *to work as a team:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *f) I feel* confident *that my subject will be included in discussions:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *g) I feel* confident *that my concerns and suggestions will be addressed and valued:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *h) I feel* confident *that we will be successful working as a team:* | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |
| *i) I would rather work* on my own: | *VERY MUCH* | *SOMEWHAT* | *A LITTLE* | *NOT AT ALL* |

## Appendix D

## TEACHER CONSENT FORM

I (Andrea Spevak) will be conducting research on the ATA's Safe & Caring Schools Project within your school for my Masters thesis (Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta). The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to investigate the process the school goes through while adopting the Safe and Caring Schools Project and (2) to examine the changes that take place.

The information I collect will be kept strictly confidential. All names and identifying information will be changed so that the identity of the students, teachers, parents, and school is not revealed in the report. At the end of the study, all notes, transcripts, tapes, and additional data will be destroyed. This study will be carried out as stated. There is no deception involved. Before the written report is submitted, data will be made available to the Teachers and Administration to check the accuracy of the information. A copy of the finished report will be made available to anyone interested.

I, _____, hereby [consent/do not consent] for
(print your name)

the researcher, Andrea Spevak, to use the information from her meetings and discussions with the teachers for her research on the Safe & Caring Schools Project.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially
- any information that identifies me will be destroyed upon completion of this research
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- Masters' thesis
- Presentations at a conference
- Journal articles for other educators

_____ _____
Signature Date

**For further information concerning the study or the completion of the form, please contact:**

***Researcher:***
Andrea Spevak (aspevak@ualberta.ca)
Tel: 431-2860
7-130B, Education North
University of Alberta

***Advisor:***
Dr. Andre Grace (andre.grace@ualberta.ca)
Tel: 492-0767
7-119, Education North
University of Alberta

## Appendix E

## STUDENT SURVEY

### SUPPORTING A SAFE AND CARING SCHOOL: WHAT STUDENTS SAY GRADE 7 TO 9

**Purpose:** This survey asks you to tell us about some of the things you do in school and some of the things that you see others doing. The results of this survey will be used to help make your school a safer and more caring place.

**This survey is anonymous so you should NOT write your name on it.**

1. Are you a male or a female?

| A | B |
|---|---|
| Male | Female |

2. What grade are you in?

| A | B | C |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 8 | 9 |

---

**Directions:** Please think back over **the past month**, and tell us how often you experienced the items described on the following pages.

- When answering the questions, try to think of specific things that you have done or that you have seen other people doing.
- Do not report anything that someone else told you about.
- If you don't know how to answer one of the statements, put your X in the last box, under "don't know".

**PLEASE NOTE:** When we use the term "adults in my school" we are referring to all the adults that are part of your school. This includes the school staff, volunteers, secretaries, custodians, school nurse, school police officer, and any other adults that are part of life at your school.

**Go ahead now and complete the questions on the following pages.**

**Remember to focus on the last month.**

A: THE GENERAL NATURE OF MY SCHOOL

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the Time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The adults in my school show that they care about me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 2. Students in my school show that they care about me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 3. I see students being bullied by others at my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 4. I bully others at my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 5. Others bully me at my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 6. I feel safe in my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 7. Some students avoid certain places in our school because they don't feel safe. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 8. When people in my school do something important, we celebrate it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 9. I see examples of the school and the community working together. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 10. The adults in my school are interested in what is going on in my life. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

_____

_____

**B: BEHAVIOUR BETWEEN PEOPLE IN MY SCHOOL**

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. The adults in my school ask me how I am. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 12. Teachers are available for discussion and support when I need it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 13. I steal things that belong to others without asking. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 14. Someone steals something of mine without asking. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 15. People intentionally bump or push me in the hallways. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 16. I intentionally bump or push people in the hallways. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 17. When decisions that affect students are being made at school, I can share my ideas. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 18. When I make a mistake or do something wrong I admit it and try to fix it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 19. When adults in my school make mistakes or do something wrong they admit it and try to fix it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 20. Adults in my school listen to me when I talk to them. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 21. When I talk to adults in my school they look at me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 22. When I see someone I smile and am friendly. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 23. Adults in my school notice things I have done well. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 24. Adults in my school smile and are friendly. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 25. Adults in my school notice when I make mistakes. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 26. Some of my work is displayed in my school classroom. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 27. I ask people in the community to support activities at my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

C: SCHOOL CITIZENSHIP

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. In my schoolwork, I have the opportunity to use my special talents and abilities. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 29. I take part in physical activities in my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 30. I am encouraged to discuss various topics and express my point of view even when it is different than others'. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 31. I am friendly to people of different cultures, races, gender, age, sexual orientation, appearance, or ability. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 32. I make fun of people at school because they are different from me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 33. People make fun of me at school because I am different from them. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 34. I see other students being made fun of because of culture, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, appearance, or ability. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 35. I follow the 3 R's in my school (Reuse, Reduce, Recycle). | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 36. I help other people when they need it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 37. My school makes accommodations for students with special needs (physical, mental, etc.). | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

_____

_____

D: ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38. Adults in my school encourage me to take part in school activities. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 39. There is enough variety in the school activities that I can get involved in something that interests me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 40. I am asked about what activities or programs I would like to have at the school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 41. My teachers make course objectives clear to me. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 42. When I ask, I get the help I need during class or after school to help me understand my school work. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 43. I hear other students saying they are proud of our school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 44. I am proud of my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 45. Adults in my school are there for me when I need help. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 46. If people are harassing me, I know who to go to for help. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 47. My parents are involved in school activities. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

_____

_____

**E: GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS**

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 48. Adults in my school are calm when sorting out a problem. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 49. When I have a problem, the adults in my school help me explore various ways to deal with it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 50. When I am involved in a problem, I feel like my side of the story is listened to. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 51. In some of my courses at school we learn about how to handle conflicts. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 52. If I have a problem with other students, the adults in my school encourage us to work it out together. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 53. I am treated fairly by the adults in my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 54. I am treated fairly by the students in my school. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 55. When there is bullying in my school adults step in to stop it. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 56. When students misbehave at school the adults try to find out why before they give out consequences. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 57. The consequences for misbehavior in my school help students learn a better way to behave. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 58. When students misbehave in a similar way, they tend to get similar consequences, regardless of who the student is. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 59. My family and I have discussed my school's behavior policy/code of conduct. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 60 If I break school rules I know that there will be consequences expecting me to undo any wrong I have done. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

_____

_____

**F: RESOURCES**

| *How often do you experience the following?* | Most of the time | Quite often | Once in a while | Seldom | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 61. There are enough textbooks and other required resources for each student in my class. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 62. The texts, readings, videos, presentations and programs in my classes are relevant and up to date. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 63. The texts, readings, videos, presentations and programs in my classes are interesting. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| 64. The texts, readings, videos, presentations and programs in my classes help me understand the content of my courses. | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

Please write in any other similar things that you think we should know. _____

_____

_____

_____

*Thanks so much for your time!!*

## Appendix F

## PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**Your daughter/son has been invited to participate in a study on the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project being conducted at [name of school].** As a graduate student, I will be collecting data for a thesis, completing the requirements of a Master of Education degree at the University of Alberta (Department of Educational Policy Studies). The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to investigate the process a school goes through while adopting the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project and (2) to examine the changes that take place.

The Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) Project is a violence prevention and character education program that has been developed by the Alberta Teachers' Association. It is meant to encourage a school environment that models and reinforces respectful and socially responsible behaviours through its philosophy, activities, curricula, and workshops. [Name of School] has recently adopted the SACS Project, and is beginning to integrate the SACS objectives and curriculum into the regular school program. For my research I will look at how the junior high classes incorporate the safe and caring principles across the curriculum and how student and teacher attitudes and behaviours change as a result of this program.

I will be collecting data in a number of ways. **All participation in my research is completely voluntary and requires your permission as well as your child's** (they will receive a similar form). **He/She may withdraw from the study at any time. He/She may participate in some, all, or none of the following methods, depending upon the consent obtained:**

- Questionnaires (to be filled out at school this month and again near the end of the school year).
- Occasional observations during regular class time (to be coordinated with the Teacher).
- I will randomly select (by name draw of those with permission) two students from each junior high grade to participate in an interview, to take approximately 20 minutes. During this interview, I will ask the student questions about his/her views on their school and on the safe and caring principles.

The information I collect will be kept strictly confidential. All names and identifying information will be changed so that the identity of the students, teachers, parents, and school is not revealed in the report. At the end of the study, all notes, transcripts, tapes, and additional data will be destroyed. This study will be carried out as stated. There is no deception involved. Before the written report is submitted, data will be made available to the students and their parents or guardians to check the accuracy of the information. A copy of the finished report will be made available to anyone interested.

**PLEASE COMPLETE THE BACK OF THIS PAGE.**

**Data will ONLY be collected from students who have signed consent themselves (a separate form will be given) and have been granted permission by a parent/ guardian. Students may withdraw from the study at any time.**

**Aside from the thesis, this data may be used for secondary writing, such as a journal article or a conference paper. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to and no identity will be revealed.**

**Please complete this form and send it to the school with your child.**

I, _____, hereby consent for
(print name of parent/ legal guardian)

_____ to :
(print name of student)

**[Please circle EITHER YES or NO for EACH of the following]**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Take part in completing the researcher's questionnaire. | YES | NO |
| 2) Be observed during classroom activities by the researcher. | YES | NO |
| 3) Be interviewed by the researcher, if selected. | YES | NO |
| 4) Be tape recorded (audiotape) during the interview. | YES | NO |

I understand that:

- my child has been invited to be a participant in a research study.
- my child is free to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, having his/ her information withdrawn.
- all information gathered will be treated securely and confidentially, and the anonymity of each participant will be strictly maintained throughout the duration of the study.

_____ _____
Signature of parent/ legal guardian Date

**For further information concerning the study or the completion of the form, please contact:**

***Researcher:***
Andrea Spevak (aspevak@ualberta.ca)
Tel: 431-2860
7-130B, Education North
University of Alberta

***Advisor:***
Dr. Andre Grace (andre.grace@ualberta.ca)
Tel: 492-0767
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## Appendix G

## STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I am a student from the University of Alberta. I will be coming to your school to collect information for my research project. I am interested in finding out how the Safe and Caring Schools Project is working in your school. I will be asking the students in grades 7, 8, and 9 to fill out questionnaires about your school. I will also be observing some classes, and I will be randomly picking two students in each junior high grade to answer some questions about school in an interview.

If you would like to participate, please fill out and sign this form and hand it in to your teacher. If you have any questions about this study, please ask me or any of your teachers.

**Please complete this form and return it to the school.**

I, _____, agree to:
(print your name)

**[Please circle EITHER YES or NO for EACH of the following]**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Take part in completing the researcher's questionnaires. | YES | NO |
| 2) Be observed during classroom activities by the researcher. | YES | NO |
| 3) Be interviewed by the researcher, if selected. | YES | NO |
| 4) Be tape-recorded (audio-tape) during the interview. | YES | NO |

I understand that:

- I have been invited to be a participant in a research study.
- I can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, having my information withdrawn.
- All information gathered will be treated securely and confidentially, and my identity will not be revealed in the final report.

_____ _____
Student's signature Date

***For further information about the study or this form, please contact:***

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## Appendix H

## STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Preamble:** In October, you filled out a survey for the Safe and Caring Schools Project, and you signed a consent form saying that you agreed an interview with me. I want to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and for taking time from your class. You can end this interview at anytime, and you can pass on any questions.

1) How do you usually feel at school? How safe and caring is it?

2) How do students and adults treat each other at your school?
    a. Has there been a difference in the way adults treat students and each other?

3) What kinds of feelings and behaviours are important in your school?
    a. Why do you think these are important?

4) What does respect mean to you?
    a. Is it important? Why?
    b. Without naming names, can you think of an example where one of the school staff has shown respect toward you or others? What did they do? Why?

5) What does responsibility mean to you?
    a. Is it important? Why?
    b. What kinds of things do adults do to show their responsibility? Examples?

6) In school, do you learn about dealing positively with other people?
    a. Can you give me some examples?
    b. What do you do when you are in a conflict with someone? Does it work?

7) Do you know what your school's behaviour policy is (how your school deals with misbehaviour, bullying, violence, etc)?
    a. Is it effective? What do you think would work better?
    b. Has there been a change in it this year?

8) Tell me what kinds of behaviours would you classify as bullying behaviours?
    a. Do you see/ experience any of these at your school?
    b. What do your teachers or principal do about bullying? Does it work?
    c. Has there been more of a focus on bullying than before?
    d. What do you think would stop these behaviours? Why?

9) What do you know about the Safe and Caring Schools Project?
    a. Have you heard much about it in your school? What have you heard?
    b. Do you know why your school has decided to start the SACS program?
    c. Have you noticed a difference in how adults deal with behaviour problems?

**Closing:** Since this interview is meant to get your feedback on your school atmosphere and how to make it more safe and caring for every student, what else would you like to talk about or tell me?